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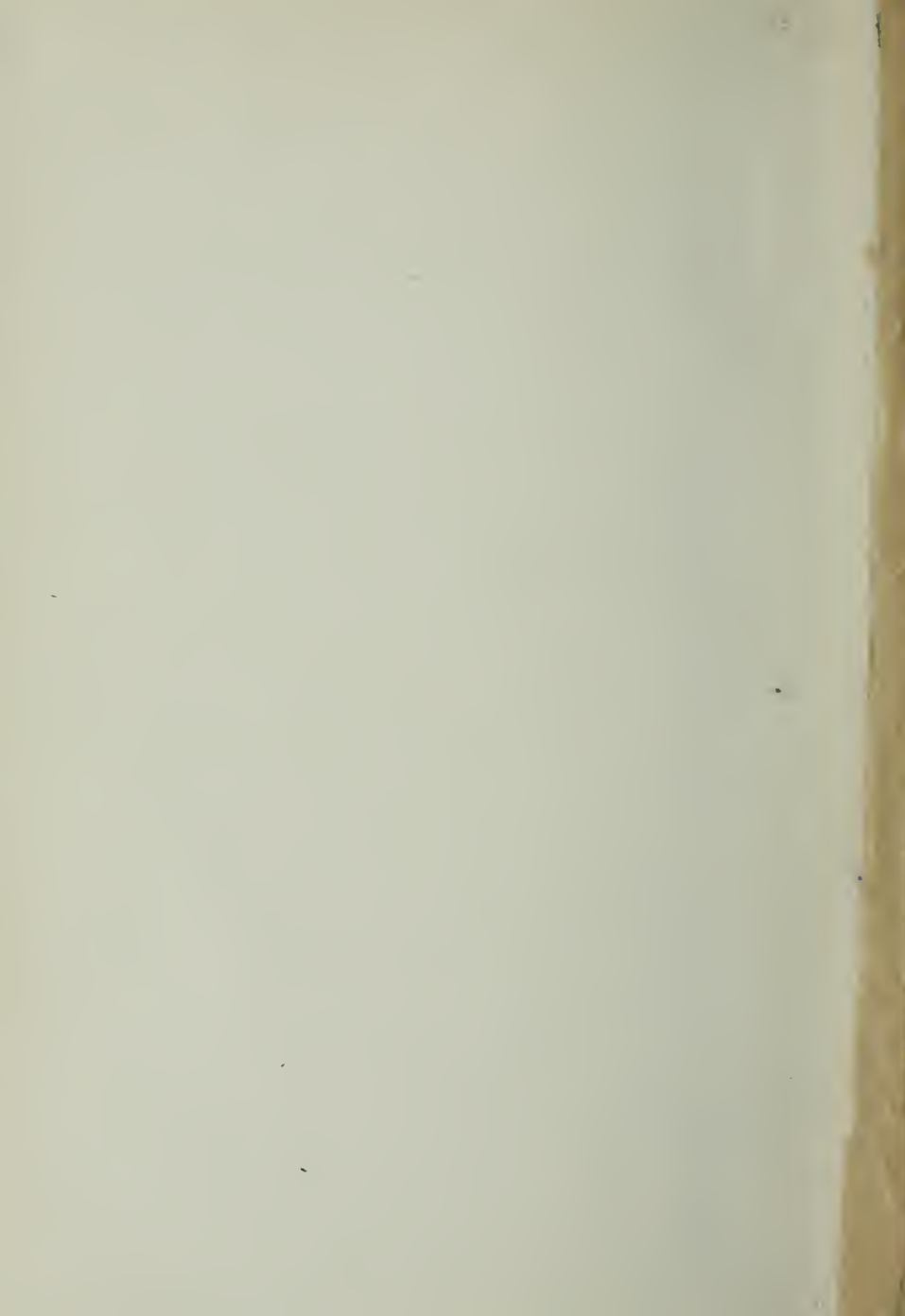


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# STANDARD BIOGRAPHY

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DEFOE,

By WILLIAM MINTO.

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By WILLIAM BLACK.

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SCOTT,

By RICHARD H. HUTTON.

THACKERAY, By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

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# DANIEL DEFOE.

BY

WILLIAM MINTO.





## P R E F A C E.

THERE are three considerable biographies of Defoe—the first, by George Chalmers, published in 1786 ; the second, by Walter Wilson, published in 1830 ; the third, by William Lee, published in 1869. All three are thorough and painstaking works, justified by independent research and discovery. The labour of research in the case of an author supposed to have written some two hundred and fifty separate books and pamphlets, very few of them under his own name, is naturally enormous ; and when it is done, the results are open to endless dispute. Probably two men could not be found who would read through the vast mass of contemporary anonymous and pseudonymous print, and agree upon a complete list of Defoe's writings. Fortunately, however, for those who wish to get a clear idea of his life and character, the identification is not pure guess-work on internal evidence. He put his own name or initials to some of his productions, and treated the authorship of others as open secrets. Enough is ascertained as his to provide us with the means for a complete understanding of his opinions and his conduct. It is Defoe's misfortune that his biographers on the large scale have occupied themselves too much with subordinate details, and have been misled from a true appreciation of his main lines of thought and action by religious, political, and hero-worshipping bias. For the following sketch, taking Mr. Lee's elaborate work as my chronological guide, I have read such of Defoe's undoubted writings as are accessible in the Library of the British Museum—there is no complete collection, I believe, in existence—and endeavoured to connect them and him with the history of the time.

W. M.



# DANIEL DEFOE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DEFOE'S YOUTH AND EARLY PURSUITS.

THE life of a man of letters is not as a rule eventful. It may be rich in spiritual experiences, but it seldom is rich in active adventure. We ask his biographer to tell us what were his habits of composition, how he talked, how he bore himself in the discharge of his duties to his family, his neighbours and himself; what were his beliefs on the great questions that concern humanity. We desire to know what he said and wrote, not what he did beyond the study and the domestic or the social circle. The chief external facts in his career are the dates of the publication of his successive books.

Daniel Defoe is an exception to this rule. He was a man of action as well as a man of letters. The writing of the books which have given him immortality was little more than an accident in his career, a comparatively trifling and casual item in the total expenditure of his many-sided energy. He was nearly sixty when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*. Before that event he had been a rebel, a merchant, a manufacturer, a writer of popular satires in verse, a bankrupt; had acted as secretary to a public commission, been employed in secret services by five successive administrations, written innumerable pamphlets, and edited more than one newspaper. He had led, in fact, as adventurous a life as any of his own heroes, and had met quickly succeeding difficulties with equally ready and fertile ingenuity.

For many of the incidents in Defoe's life we are indebted to himself. He had all the vaingloriousness of exuberant vitality, and was animated in the recital of his own adventures. Scattered throughout his various works are the materials for a tolerably complete autobiography. This is in one respect an advantage for any one who attempts to give an account of his life. But it has a counterbalancing disadvantage in the circumstance that there is grave reason to doubt his veracity. Defoe was a great story-teller in more senses than one. We can hardly believe a word that he says about himself without independent confirmation.

Defoe was born in London, in 1661. It is a characteristic circumstance that his name is not his own, except in the sense that it was assumed by himself. The name of his father, who was a butcher in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, was Foe. His grandfather was a Northamptonshire yeoman. In his *True Born Englishman*, Defoe spoke very contemptuously of families that professed to 'have come over with "the Norman bastard," defying them to prove whether their ancestors were drummers or colonels; but apparently he was not above the vanity of making the world believe that he himself was of Norman-French origin. Yet such was the restless energy of the man that he could not leave even his adopted name alone; he seems to have been about forty when he first changed his signature "D. Foe" into the surname of "Defoe;" but his patient biographer, Mr. Lee, has found several later instances of his subscribing himself "D. Foe," "D. F.," and "De Foe," in alternation with the "Daniel De Foe," or "Daniel Defoe," which has become his accepted name in literature.

In middle age, when Defoe was taunted with his want of learning, he retorted that if he was a blockhead it was not the fault of his father, who had "spared nothing in his education that might qualify him to match the accurate Dr. Browne, or the learned Observator." His father was a Nonconformist, a member of the congregation of Dr. Annesley, and the son was originally intended for the Dissenting ministry. "It was his disaster," he said afterwards, "first to be set apart for, and then to be set apart from, that sacred employ." He was placed at an academy for the training of ministers at the age, it is supposed, of about fourteen, and probably remained there for the full course of five years. He has himself explained why, when his training was completed, he did not proceed to the office of the pulpit, but changed his views and resolved to engage in business as a hose-merchant. The sum of the explanation is that the ministry seemed to him at that time to be neither honourable, agreeable, nor profitable. It was degraded, he thought, by the entrance of men who had neither physical nor intellectual qualification for it, who had received out of a denominational fund only such an education as made them pedants rather than Christian gentlemen of high learning, and who had consequently to submit to shameful and degrading practices in their efforts to obtain congregations and subsistence. Besides, the behaviour of congregations to their ministers, who were dependent, was often objectionable and un-Christian. And finally, far-flown birds having fine feathers, the prizes of the ministry in London were generally given to strangers, "eminent ministers *called* from all parts of England," some even from Scotland, finding acceptance in the metropolis before having received any formal ordination.

Though the education of his "fund-bred" companions, as he calls them, at Mr. Morton's Academy in Newington Green, was such as to excite Defoe's contempt, he bears testimony to Mr. Morton's excel-



lence as a teacher, and instances the names of several pupils who did credit to his labours. In one respect Mr. Morton's system was better than that which then prevailed at the Universities; all dissertations were written and all disputations held in English; and hence it resulted, Defoe says, that his pupils, though they were "not destitute in the languages," were "made masters of the English tongue, and more of them excelled in that particular than of any school at that time." Whether Defoe obtained at Newington the rudiments of all the learning which he afterwards claimed to be possessed of, we do not know; but the taunt frequently levelled at him by University men of being an "illiterate fellow" and no scholar, was one that he bitterly resented, and that drew from him many protestations and retorts. In 1705, he angrily challenged John Tutchin "to translate with him any Latin, French, or Italian author, and after that to re-translate them crosswise for twenty pounds each book;" and he replied to Swift, who had spoken of him scornfully as "an illiterate fellow, whose name I forget," that "he had been in his time pretty well master of five languages, and had not lost them yet, though he wrote no bill at his door, nor set Latin quotations on the front of the *Review*." To the end of his days Defoe could not forget this taunt of want of learning. In one of the papers in *Applebee's Journal*, identified by Mr. Lee (below Chapter VIII.), he discussed what is to be understood by "learning," and drew the following sketch of his own attainments—

"I remember an Author in the World some years ago, who was generally upbraided with ignorance, and called an 'Illiterate Fellow,' by some of the *Beau-Monde* of the last age. . . .

"I happened to come into this Person's Study once, and I found him busy translating a Description of the Course of the River Boristhenes, out of *Bleau's* Geography, written in *Spanish*. Another Time I found him translating some Latin Paragraphs out of *Leubnitz's Theatri Cometici*, being a learned Discourse upon Comets; and that I might see whether it was genuine, I looked on some part of it that he had finished, and found by it that he understood the Latin very well, and had perfectly taken the sense of that difficult Author. In short, I found he understood the *Latin*, the *Spanish*, the *Italian*, and could read the *Greek*, and I knew before that he spoke *French* fluently—*yet this Man was no Scholar*.

"As to Science, on another Occasion, I heard him dispute (in such a manner as surprised me) upon the emotions of the Heavenly Bodies, the Distance, Magnitude, Revolutions, and especially the Influences of the Planets, the Nature and probable Revolutions of Comets, the excellency of the New Philosophy, and the like; but *this Man was no Scholar*.

"In Geography and History he had all the World at his Finger's ends. He talked of the most distant Countries with an inimitable Exactness; and changing from one Place to another, the Company thought, of every Place or Country he named, that certainly he must have been born there. He knew not only where every Thing was, but what everybody did in every Part of the World; I mean, what Businesses, what Trade, what Manufacture, was carrying on in every Part of the World; and had the History of almost all the Nations of the World in his Head—*yet this Man was no Scholar*.

"This put me upon wondering, ever so long ago, what this *strange Thing* called a Man of Learning was, and what is it that constitutes a *Scholar*? For, said I, here's a man speaks five Languages and reads the *Sixth*, is a master of Astron-

omy, Geography, History, and abundance of other useful Knowledge (which I do not mention, that you may not guess at the Man, who is too Modest to desire it), and yet, they say *this Man is no Scholar.*"

How much of this learning Defoe acquired at school, and how much he picked up afterwards under the pressure of the necessities of his business, it is impossible to determine, but at any rate it was at least as good a qualification for writing on public affairs as the more limited and accurate scholarship of his academic rivals. Whatever may have been the extent of his knowledge when he passed from Mr. Morton's tuition, qualified but no longer willing to become a Dissenting preacher, he did not allow it to rust unused; he at once mobilised his forces for active service. They were keen politicians, naturally, at the Newington Academy, and the times furnished ample materials for their discussions. As Nonconformists they were very closely affected by the struggle between Charles II. and the defenders of Protestantism and popular liberties. What part Defoe took in the excitement of the closing years of the reign of Charles must be matter of conjecture, but there can be little doubt that he was active on the popular side. He had but one difference then, he afterwards said in one of his tracts, with his party. He would not join them in wishing for the success of the Turks in besieging Vienna, because, though the Austrians were Papists, and though the Turks were ostensibly on the side of the Hungarian reformers whom the Austrian Government had persecuted, he had read the history of the Turks and could not pray for their victory over Christians of any denomination. "Though then but a young man, and a younger author" (this was in 1683), "he opposed it and wrote against it, which was taken very unkindly indeed." From these words it would seem that Defoe had thus early begun to write pamphlets on questions of the hour. As he was on the weaker side, and any writing might have cost him his life, it is probable that he did not put his name to any of these tracts; none of them have been identified; but his youth was strangely unlike his mature manhood if he was not justified in speaking of himself as having been then an "author." Nor was he content merely with writing. It would have been little short of a miracle if his restless energy had allowed him to lie quiet while the air was thick with political intrigue. We may be sure that he had a voice in some of the secret associations in which plans were discussed of armed resistance to the tyranny of the King. We have his own word for it that he took part in the Duke of Monmouth's rising, when the whips of Charles were exchanged for the scorpions of James. He boasted of this when it became safe to do so, and the truth of the boast derives incidental confirmation from the fact that the names of three of his fellow-students at Newington appear in the list of the victims of Jeffreys and Kirke.

Escaping the keen hunt that was made for all participators in the rebellion, Defoe, towards the close of 1685, began business as a hosier or hose-factor in Freeman's Court, Cornhill. The precise nature of his trade has been disputed; and it does not particularly concern us here. When taunted afterwards with having been apprentice to a hosier, he indignantly denied the fact, and explained that though he had been a trader in hosiery he had never been a shopkeeper. A passing illustration in his *Essay on Projects*, drawn from his own experience, shows that he imported goods in the course of his business from abroad; he speaks of sometimes having paid more in insurance premiums than he had cleared by a voyage. From a story which he tells in his *Complete English Tradesman*, recalling the cleverness with which he defeated an attempt to outwit him about a consignment of brandy, we learn that his business sometimes took him to Spain. This is nearly all that we know about his first adventure in trade, except that after seven years, in 1692, he had to flee from his creditors. He hints in one of his *Reviews* that this misfortune was brought about by the frauds of swindlers, and it deserves to be recorded that he made the honourable boast that he afterwards paid off his obligations. The truth of the boast is independently confirmed by the admission of a controversial enemy, that very Tutchin whom he challenged to translate Latin with him. That Defoe should have referred so little to his own experience in the *Complete English Tradesman*, a series of Familiar Letters which he published late in life "for the instruction of our Inland Tradesmen, and especially of Young Beginners," is accounted for when we observe the class of persons to whom the letters were addressed. He distinguishes with his usual clearness between the different ranks of those employed in the production and exchange of goods, and intimates that his advice is not intended for the highest grade of traders, the merchants, whom he defines by what he calls the vulgar expression, as being "such as trade beyond sea." Although he was eloquent in many books and pamphlets in upholding the dignity of trade, and lost no opportunity of scoffing at pretentious gentility, he never allows us to forget that this was the grade to which he himself belonged, and addresses the petty trader from a certain altitude. He speaks in the preface to the *Complete Tradesman* of unfortunate creatures who have blown themselves up in trade, whether "for want of wit or from too much wit;" but lest he should be supposed to allude to his own misfortunes, he does not say that he miscarried himself, but that he "had seen in a few years' experience many young tradesmen miscarry." At the same time it is fair to conjecture that when Defoe warns the young tradesman against fancying himself a politician or a man of letters, running off to the coffee-house when he ought to be behind the counter, and reading Virgil and Horace when he should be busy over his journal



and his ledger, he was glancing at some of the causes which conduced to his own failure as a merchant. And when he cautions the beginner against going too fast, and holds up to him as a type and exemplar the carrier's waggon, which "keeps wagging and always goes on," and "as softly as it goes" can yet in time go far, we may be sure that he was thinking of the over-rashness with which he had himself embarked in speculation.

There can be no doubt that eager and active as Defoe was in his trading enterprises, he was not so wrapt up in them as to be an unconcerned spectator of the intense political life of the time. When King James aimed a blow at the Church of England by removing the religious disabilities of all Dissenters, Protestant and Catholic, in his Declaration of Indulgence, some of Defoe's co-religionists were ready to catch at the boon without thinking of its consequences. He differed from them, he afterwards stated, and "as he used to say that he had rather the Popish House of Austria should ruin the Protestants in Hungaria, than the infidel House of Ottoman should ruin both Protestants and Papists by overrunning Germany," so now "he told the Dissenters he had rather the Church of England should pull our clothes off by fines and forfeitures, than the Papists should fall both upon the Church and the Dissenters, and pull our skins off by fire and faggot." He probably embodied these conclusions of his vigorous common sense in a pamphlet, though no pamphlet on the subject known for certain to be his has been preserved. Mr. Lee is over-rash in identifying as Defoe's a quarto sheet of that date entitled "A letter containing some Reflections on His Majesty's declaration for Liberty of Conscience." Defoe may have written many pamphlets on the stirring events of the time, which have not come down to us. It may have been then that he acquired, or made a valuable possession by practice, that marvelous facility with his pen which stood him in such stead in after-life. It would be no wonder if he wrote dozens of pamphlets, every one of which disappeared. The pamphlet then occupied the place of the newspaper leading article. The newspapers of the time were veritable chronicles of news, and not organs of opinion. The expression of opinion was not then associated with the dissemination of facts and rumors. A man who wished to influence public opinion wrote a pamphlet, small or large, a single leaf or a tract of a few pages, and had it hawked about the streets and sold in the bookshops. These pamphlets issued from the press in swarms, were thrown aside when read, and hardly preserved except by accident. That Defoe, if he wrote any or many, should not have reprinted them when fifteen years afterwards he published a collection of his works, is intelligible; he republished only such of his tracts as had not lost their practical interest. If, however, we indulge in the fancy, warranted so far by his describing himself as having been a young



"author" in 1683, that Defoe took an active part in polemical literature under Charles and James, we must remember that the censorship of the press was then active, and that Defoe must have published under greater disadvantages than those who wrote on the side of the Court.

At the Revolution, in 1688, Defoe lost no time in making his adhesion to the new monarch conspicuous. He was, according to Oldmixon, one of "a royal regiment of volunteer horse, made up of the chief citizens, who, being gallantly mounted and richly accoutred, were led by the Earl of Monmouth, now Earl of Peterborough, and attended their Majesties from Whitehall" to a banquet given by the Lord Mayor and Corporation of the City. Three years afterwards, on the occasion of the Jacobite plot in which Lord Preston was the leading figure, he published the first pamphlet that is known for certain to be his. It is in verse, and is entitled *A New Discovery of an Old Intrigue, a Satire levelled at Treachery and Ambition*. In the preface, the author said that "he had never drawn his pen before," and that he would never write again unless this effort produced a visible reformation. If we take this literally, we must suppose that his claim to have been an author eighteen years before had its origin in his fitful vanity. The literary merits of the satire, when we compare it with the powerful verse of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, to which he refers in the exordium, are not great. Defoe prided himself upon his verse, and in a catalogue of the Poets in one of his later pieces assigned himself the special province of "lampoon." He possibly believed that his clever doggerel was a better title to immortality than *Robinson Crusoe*. The immediate popular effect of his satires gave some encouragement to this belief, but they are comparatively dull reading for posterity. The clever hits at living City functionaries, indicated by their initials and nicknames, the rough ridicule and the biting innuendo, were telling in their day, but the lampoons have perished with their objects. The local celebrity of Sir Ralph and Sir Peter, Silly Will and Captain Tom the Tailor, has vanished, and Defoe's hurried and formless lines, incisive as their vivid force must have been, are not redeemed from dullness for modern readers by the few bright epigrams with which they are besprinkled.

## CHAPTER II.

## KING WILLIAM'S ADJUTANT.

DEFOE'S first business catastrophe happened about 1692. He is said to have temporarily absconded, and to have parleyed with his creditors from a distance till they agreed to accept a composition. Bristol is named as having been his place of refuge, and there is a story that he was known there as the Sunday Gentleman, because he appeared on that day, and that day only, in fashionable attire, being kept indoors during the rest of the week by fear of the bailiffs. But he was of too buoyant a temperament to sink under his misfortune from the sense of having brought it on himself, and the cloud soon passed away. A man so fertile in expedients and ready, according to his own idea of a thoroughbred trader, to turn himself to anything, could not long remain unemployed. He had various business offers, and among others an invitation from some merchants to settle at Cadiz as a commission agent, "with offers of very good commissions." But Providence, he tells us, and, we may add, a shrewd confidence in his own powers, "placed a secret aversion in his mind to quitting England upon any account, and made him refuse the best offers of that kind." He stayed at home, "to be concerned with some eminent persons in proposing ways and means to the Government for raising money to supply the occasion of the war then newly begun." He also wrote a vigorous and loyal pamphlet, entitled, *The Englishman's Choice and True Interest: in the vigorous prosecution of the war against France, and serving K. William and Q. Mary, and acknowledging their right*. As a reward for his literary or his financial services, or for both, he was appointed, "without the least application" of his own, Accountant to the Commissioners of the Glass Duty, and held this post till the duty was abolished in 1699.

From 1694 to the end of William's reign was the most prosperous and honourable period in Defoe's life. His services to the Government did not absorb the whole of his restless energy. He still had time for private enterprise, and started a manufactory of bricks and pantiles at Tilbury, where, Mr. Lee says, judging from fragments recently dug up, he made good sound sonorous bricks, although according to another authority such a thing was impossible out of any material existing in the neighbourhood. Anyhow, Defoe prospered, and set up a coach and a pleasure boat. Nor must we forget what is so much to his honour, that he set himself to pay his creditors in full, voluntarily disregarding the composition which they had accepted. In 1705 he was able to boast that he had reduced his debts in spite of many difficulties from 17,000*l.* to 5,000*l.*, but these sums included liabilities resulting from the failure of his pantile factory.

Defoe's first conspicuous literary service to King William, after he obtained Government employment, was a pamphlet on the question of a Standing Army raised after the Peace of Ryswick in 1697. This Pen and Ink War, as he calls it, which followed close on the heels of the great European struggle, had been raging for some time before Defoe took the field. Hosts of writers had appeared to endanger the permanence of the triumph of William's arms and diplomacy by demanding the disbandment of his tried troops, as being a menace to domestic liberties. Their arguments had been encountered by no less zealous champions of the King's cause. The battle, in fact, had been won when Defoe issued his *Argument showing that a Standing Army, with consent of Parliament, is not inconsistent with a Free Government*. He was able to boast in his preface that "if books and writings would not, God be thanked the Parliament would confute" his adversaries. Nevertheless, though coming late in the day, Defoe's pamphlet was widely read, and must have helped to consolidate the victory.

Thus late in life did Defoe lay the first stone of his literary reputation. He was now in the thirty-eighth year of his age, his controversial genius in full vigour, and his mastery of language complete. None of his subsequent tracts surpass this as a piece of trenchant and persuasive reasoning. It shows at their very highest his marvellous powers of combining constructive with destructive criticism. He dashes into the lists with good-humoured confidence, bearing the banner of clear common sense, and disclaiming sympathy with extreme persons of either side. He puts his case with direct and plausible force, addressing his readers vivaciously as plain people like himself, among whom as reasonable men there cannot be two opinions. He cuts rival arguments to pieces with dexterous strokes, representing them as the confused reasoning of well-meaning but dull intellects, and dances with lively mockery on the fragments. If the authors of such arguments knew their own minds, they would be entirely on his side. He echoes the pet prejudices of his readers as the props and mainstays of his thesis, and boldly laughs away misgivings of which they are likely to be half ashamed. He makes no parade of logic; he is only a plain freeholder like the mass whom he addresses, though he knows twenty times as much as many writers of more pretension. He never appeals to passion or imagination; what he strives to enlist on his side is homely self-interest, and the ordinary sense of what is right and reasonable. There is little regularity of method in the development of his argument; that he leaves to more anxious and elaborate masters of style. For himself he is content to start from a bold and clear statement of his own opinion, and proceeds buoyantly and discursively to engage and scatter his enemies as they turn up, without the least fear of being able to fight his way back to his original base. He wrote for a class to whom a prolonged



intellectual operation, however comprehensive and complete, was distasteful. To persuade the mass of the freeholders was his object, and for such an object there are no political tracts in the language at all comparable to Defoe's. He bears some resemblance to Cobbett, but he had none of Cobbett's brutality; his faculties were more adroit, and his range of vision infinitely wider. Cobbett was a demagogue, Defoe a popular statesman. The one was qualified to lead the people, the other to guide them. Cobbett is contained in Defoe as the less is contained in the greater.

King William obtained a standing army from Parliament, but not so large an army as he wished, and it was soon afterwards still further reduced. Meantime, Defoe employed his pen in promoting objects which were dear to the King's heart. His *Essay on Projects*—which "relate to Civil Polity as well as matters of negoce"—was calculated, in so far as it advocated joint stock enterprise, to advance one of the objects of the statesmen of the Revolution, the committal of the moneyed classes to the established Government, and against a dynasty which might plausibly be mistrusted of respect for visible accumulations of private wealth. Defoe's projects were of an extremely varied kind. The classification was not strict. His spirited definition of the word "projects" included Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel, as well as Captain Phipps's scheme for raising the wreck of a Spanish ship laden with silver. He is sometimes credited with remarkable shrewdness in having anticipated in this *Essay* some of the greatest public improvements of modern times—the protection of seamen, the higher education of women, the establishment of banks and benefit societies, the construction of highways. But it is not historically accurate to give him the whole credit of these conceptions. Most of them were floating about at the time, so much so that he had to defend himself against a charge of plagiarism, and few of them have been carried out in accordance with the essential features of his plans. One remarkable circumstance in Defoe's projects, which we may attribute either to his own national bent or to his compliance with the King's humour, is the extent to which he advocated Government interference. He proposed, for example, an income-tax, and the appointment of a commission who should travel through the country and ascertain by inquiry that the tax was not evaded. In making this proposal he shows an acquaintance with private incomes in the City, which raises some suspicion as to the capacity in which he was "associated with certain eminent persons in proposing ways and means to the Government." In his article on Banks, he expresses himself dissatisfied that the Government did not fix a maximum rate of interest for the loans made by chartered banks; they were otherwise, he complained, of no assistance to the poor trader, who might as well go to the goldsmiths as before. His Highways project was a scheme for making national highways on a scale worthy of Baron Haussmann. There is more

fervid imagination and daring ingenuity than business talent in Defoe's essay ; if his trading speculations were conducted with equal rashness, it is not difficult to understand their failure. The most notable of them are the schemes of a dictator, rather than of the advisor of a free Government. The essay is chiefly interesting as a monument of Defoe's marvellous force of mind and strange mixture of steady sense with incontinent flightiness. There are ebullient sallies in it which we generally find only in the production of madmen and charlatans, and yet it abounds in suggestions which statesmen might profitably have set themselves with due adaptations to carry into effect. The *Essay on Projects* might alone be adduced in proof of Defoe's title to genius.

One of the first projects to which the Government of the Revolution addressed itself was the reformation of manners—a purpose at once commendable in itself and politically useful as distinguishing the new Government from the old. Even while the King was absent in Ireland at the beginning of his reign, the Queen issued a letter calling upon all justices of the peace and other servants of the Crown to exert themselves in suppressing the luxuriant growth of vice, which had been fostered by the example of the Court of Charles. On the conclusion of the war in 1697, William issued a most elaborate proclamation to the same effect, and an address was voted by Parliament, asking his Majesty to see that wickedness was discouraged in high places. The lively pamphlet in which Defoe lent his assistance to the good work entitled *The Poor Man's Plea*, was written in the spirit of the parliamentary address. It was of no use to pass laws and make declarations and proclamations for the reform of the common *plebeii*, the poor man pleaded, so long as the mentors of the laws were themselves corrupt. His argument was spiced with amusing anecdotes to show the prevalence of swearing and drunkenness among members of the judicial bench. Defoe appeared several times afterwards in the character of a reformer of manners, sometimes in verse, sometimes in prose. When the retort was made that his own manners were not perfect, he denied that this invalidated the worth of his appeal, but at the same time challenged his accusers to prove him guilty of any of the vices that he had satirised.

It is impossible now to ascertain what induced Defoe to break with the Dissenters, among whom he had been brought up, but break with them he did in his pamphlet against the practice of *Occasional Conformity*. This practice of occasionally taking communion with the Established Church, as a qualification for public office, had grown up after the Revolution, and had attracted very little notice till a Dissenting lord mayor, after attending church one Sunday forenoon, went in the afternoon with all the insignia of his office to a Conventicle. Defoe's objection to this is indicated in his quotation, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him." A man,

he contended, who could reconcile it with his conscience to attend the worship of the Church, had no business to be a Dissenter. Occasional conformity was "either a sinful act in itself, or else his dissenting before was sinful." The Dissenters naturally did not like this intolerant logical dilemma, and resented its being forced upon them by one of their own number against a practical compromise to which the good sense of the majority of them assented. No reply was made to the pamphlet when first issued in 1698; and two or three years afterwards Defoe, exulting in the unanswerable logic of his position, reprinted it with a prefatory challenge to Mr. Howe, an eminent Dissenting minister. During the next reign, however, when a bill was introduced to prohibit the practice of occasional conformity, Defoe strenuously wrote against it as a breach of the Toleration Act and a measure of persecution. In strict logic it is possible to make out a case for his consistency, but the reasoning must be fine, and he cannot be acquitted of having in the first instance practically justified a persecution which he afterwards condemned. In neither case does he point at the repeal of the Test Act as his object, and it is impossible to explain his attitude in both cases on the ground of principle. However much he objected to see the sacrament taken as a matter of form, it was hardly his province, in the circumstances in which Dissenters then stood, to lead an outcry against the practice; and if he considered it scandalous and sinful, he could not with much consistency protest against the prohibition of it as an act of persecution. Of this no person was better aware than Defoe himself, and it is a curious circumstance that, in his first pamphlet on the bill for putting down occasional conformity, he ridiculed the idea of its being persecution to suppress politic or state Dissenters, and maintained that the bill did not concern true Dissenters at all. To this, however, we must refer again in connection with his celebrated tract, *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*.

The troubles into which the European system was plunged by the death of the childless King of Spain, and that most dramatic of historical surprises, the bequest of his throne by a death-bed will to the Duke of Anjou, the second grandson of Louis XIV., furnished Defoe with a great opportunity for his controversial genius. In Charles II.'s will, if the legacy was accepted, William saw the ruin of a life-long policy. Louis, though he was doubly pledged against acknowledging the will, having renounced all pretensions to the throne of Spain for himself and his heirs in the Treaty of the Pyrenees, and consented in two successive treaties of partition to a different plan of succession, did not long hesitate; the news that he had saluted his grandson as King of Spain followed close upon the news of Charles's death. The balance of the great Catholic Powers which William had established by years of anxious diplomacy and costly war, was toppled over by a stroke of a pen. With Spain and Italy virtually added to



his dominions, the French King would now be supreme upon the Continent. Louis soon showed that this was his view of what had happened, by saying that the Pyrenees had ceased to exist. He gave a practical illustration of the same view by seizing, with the authority of his grandson, the frontier towns of the Spanish Netherlands, which were garrisoned under a special treaty by Dutch troops. Though deeply enraged at the bad faith of the most Christian King, William was not dismayed. The stone which he had rolled up the hill with such effort had suddenly rolled down again, but he was eager to renew his labours. Before, however, he could act, he found himself, to his utter astonishment and mortification, paralysed by the attitude of the English Parliament. His alarm at the accession of a Bourbon to the Spanish throne was not shared by the ruling classes in England. They declared that they liked the Spanish King's will better than William's partition. France, they argued, would gain much less by a dynastic alliance with Spain, which would exist no longer than their common interests dictated, than by the complete acquisition of the Spanish provinces in Italy.

William lost no time in summoning a new Parliament. An overwhelming majority opposed the idea of vindicating the Partition Treaty by arms. They pressed him to send a message of recognition to Phillip V. Even the occupation of the Flemish fortresses did not change their temper. That, they said, was the affair of the Dutch : it did not concern England. In vain William tried to convince them that the interests of the two Protestant States were identical. In the numerous pamphlets that were hatched by the ferment, it was broadly insinuated that the English people might pay too much for the privilege of having a Dutch King, who had done nothing for them that they could not have done for themselves, and who was perpetually sacrificing the interests of his adopted country to the necessities of his beloved Holland. What had England gained by the peace of Ryswick? Was England to be dragged into another exhausting war, merely to secure a strong frontier for the Dutch? The appeal found ready listeners among a people in whose minds the recollections of the last war were still fresh, and who still felt the burdens it had left behind. William did not venture to take any steps to form an alliance against France, till a new incident emerged to shake the country from its mood of surly calculation. When James II. died and Louis recognised the Pretender as King of England, all thoughts of isolation from a Continental confederacy were thrown to the winds. William dissolved his Long Parliament, and found the new House as warlike as the former had been peaceful. "Of all the nations in the world," cried Defoe, in commenting on this sudden change of mood, "there is none that I know of so entirely governed by their humour as the English."

For ten months Defoe had been vehemently but vainly striving to

accomplish by argument what had been wrought in an instant by the French King's insufferable insult. It is one of the most brilliant periods of his political activity. Comparatively undistinguished before, he now, at the age of forty, stepped into the foremost rank of publicists. He lost not a moment in throwing himself into the fray as the champion of the king's policy. Charles of Spain died on the 22nd of October, 1701 : by the middle of November, a few days after the news had reached England, and before the French King's resolve to acknowledge the legacy was known, Defoe was ready with a pamphlet to the clear and stirring title of—*The Two Great questions considered. I. What the French King will do with respect to the Spanish Monarchy. II. What measures the English ought to take.* If the French King were wise, he argued, he would reject the dangerous gift for his grandson. But if he accepted it, England had no choice but to combine with her late allies, the Emperor and the States, and compel the Duke of Anjou to withdraw his claims. This pamphlet being virulently attacked, and its author accused of bidding for a place at Court, Defoe made a spirited rejoinder, and seized the occasion to place his arguments in still clearer light. Between them the two pamphlets are a masterly exposition, from the point of view of English interests, of the danger of permitting the Will to be fulfilled. He tears the arguments of his opponents to pieces with supreme scorn. What matters it to us who is King of Spain? asks one adversary. As well ask, retorts Defoe, what it matters to us who is King of Ireland. All this talk about the Balance of Power, says another, is only "a shoeing-horn to draw on a standing army." We do not want an army; only let us make our fleet strong enough and we may defy the world; our militia is perfectly able to defend us against invasion. If our militia is so strong, is Defoe's reply, why should a standing-army make us fear for our domestic liberties? But if you object to a standing-army in England, avert the danger by subsidising allies and raising and paying troops in Germany and the Low Countries. Even if we are capable of beating off invasion, it is always wise policy to keep the war out of our own country, and not trust to such miracles as the dispersion of the Armada. In war, Defoe says, repeating a favourite axiom of his, "it is not the longest sword but the longest purse that conquers," and if the French get the Spanish crown, they get the richest trade in the world into their hands. The French would prove better husbands of the wealth of Mexico and Peru than the Spaniards. They would build fleets with it, which would place our American plantations at their mercy. Our own trade with Spain, one of the most profitable fields of our enterprise, would at once be ruined. Our Mediterranean trade would be burdened with the impost of a toll at Gibraltar. In short, Defoe contended, if the French acquired the upper hand in Spain, nothing but a miracle could save England from becoming practically a French province.



Defoe's appeal to the sense of self-interest fell, however, upon deaf ears. No eloquence or ingenuity of argument could have availed to stem the strong current of growling prepossession. He was equally unsuccessful in his attempt to touch deeper feelings by exhibiting in a pamphlet, which is perhaps the ablest of the series, *The danger of the Protestant Religion, from the present prospect of a Religious War in Europe*. "Surely you cannot object to a standing army for the defence of your religion," he argued, "for if you do, then you stand convicted of valuing your liberties more than your religion, which ought to be your first and highest concern." Such scraps of rhetorical logic were but as straws in the storms of anti-warlike passion that was then raging. Nor did Defoe succeed in turning the elections by addressing "to the good people of England" his *Six Distinguishing Characters of a Parliament Man*, or by protesting as a freeholder against the levity of making the strife between the new and the old East India Companies a testing question, when the very existence of the kingdom was at stake. His pamphlets were widely distributed, but he might as soon have tried to check a tempest by throwing handfuls of leaves into it. One great success, however, he had, and that, strangely enough, in a direction in which it was least to be anticipated. No better proof could be given that the good-humoured magnanimity and sense of fair-play on which English people pride themselves is more than an empty boast than the reception accorded to Defoe's *True-Born Englishman*. King William's unpopularity was at its height. A party writer of the time had sought to inflame the general dislike to his Dutch favourites by "a vile pamphlet in abhorred verse," entitled *The Foreigners*, in which they are loaded with scurrilous insinuations. It required no ordinary courage in the state of the national temper at that moment to venture upon the line of retort that Defoe adopted. What were the English, he demanded, that they should make a mock of foreigners? They were the most mongrel race that ever lived upon the face of the earth; there was no such thing as a true-born Englishman; they were all the offspring of foreigners; what was more, of the scum of foreigners.

"For Englishmen to boast of generation  
Cancels their knowledge, and lampoons the nation.  
A true-born Englishman 's a contradiction,  
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.

\* \* \* \* \*

And here begins the ancient pedigree  
That so exalts our poor nobility.  
'Tis that from some French trooper they derive,  
Who with the Norman bastard did arrive;  
The trophies of the families appear,  
Some show the sword, the bow, and some the spear,  
Which their great ancestors, forsooth, did wear.  
These in the herald's register remain,  
Their noble, mean extraction to explain,

Yet who the hero was no man can tell,  
 Whether a drummer or colonel ;  
 The silent record blushes to reveal  
 Their undescended dark original.

\* \* \* \*

" These are the heroes that despise the Dutch  
 And rail at new-come foreigners so much ;  
 Forgetting that themselves are all derived  
 From the most scoundrel race that ever lived ;  
 A horrid crowd of rambling thieves and drones,  
 Who ransacked kingdoms and dispeopled towns ;  
 The Pict and painted Briton, treacherous Scot,  
 By hunger, theft, and rapine hither brought ;  
 Norwegian pirates, buccaneering Danes,  
 Whose red-haired offspring everywhere remains ;  
 Who joined with Norman French compound the breed  
 From whence your true-born Englishmen proceed.

" And lest, by length of time, it be pretended,  
 The climate may this modern breed have mended,  
 Wise Providence, to keep us where we are,  
 Mixes us daily with exceeding care ;  
 We have been Europe's sink, the jacks where she  
 Voids all her offal outcast progeny ;  
 From our fifth Henry's time the strolling bands  
 Of banished fugitives from neighbouring lands  
 Have here a certain sanctuary found:  
 The eternal refuge of the vagabond,  
 Wherein but half a common age of time,  
 Borrowing new blood and manners from the clime,  
 Proudly they learn all mankind to contemn,  
 And all their race are true-born Englishmen."

As may be judged from this specimen, there is little delicacy in Defoe's satire. The lines run on from beginning to end in the same strain of bold, broad, hearty banter, as if the whole piece had been written off at a heat. The mob did not lynch the audacious humourist. In the very height of their fury against foreigners, they stopped short to laugh at themselves. They were tickled by the hard blows, as we may suppose a rhinoceros to be tickled by the strokes of an oaken cudgel. Defoe suddenly woke to find himself the hero of the hour, at least with the London populace. The pamphlet was pirated, and eighty thousand copies, according to his own calculation, were sold in the streets. Henceforth he described himself in his title-pages as the author of the *True-Born Englishman*, and frequently did himself the honour of quoting from the work as from a well-established classic. It was also, he has told us, the means of his becoming personally known to the King, whom he had hitherto served from a distance.

Defoe was not the man to be abashed by his own popularity. He gloried in it, and added to his reputation by taking a prominent part in the proceedings connected with the famous Kentish Petition, which

marked the turn of the tide in favour of the King's foreign policy. Defoe was said to be the author of "Legion's Memorial" to the House of Commons, sternly warning the representatives of the freeholders that they had exceeded their powers in imprisoning the men who had prayed them to "turn their loyal addresses into Bills of Supply." When the Kentish Petitioners were liberated from the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms, and feasted by the citizens at Mercers' Hall, Defoe was seated next to them as an honoured guest.

Unfortunately for Defoe, William did not live long after he had been honoured with his Majesty's confidence. He declared afterwards that he had often been privately consulted by the King. The pamphlets which he wrote during the close of the reign are all such as might have been directly inspired. That on the Succession is chiefly memorable as containing a suggestion that the heirs of the Duke of Monmouth should be heard as to King Charles's alleged marriage with Lucy Walters. It is possible that this idea may have been sanctioned by the King, who had had painful experience of the disadvantages attending a ruler of foreign extraction, and besides had reason to doubt the attachment of the Princess Sophia to the Protestant faith. When the passionate aversion to war in the popular mind was suddenly changed by the recognition of the Pretender into an equally passionate thirst for it, and the King seized the opportunity to dissolve Parliament and get a new House in accord with the altered temper of the people, Defoe justified the appeal to the freeholders by an examination and assertion of "the Original Power of the Collective Body of the People of England." His last service to the King was a pamphlet bearing the paradoxical title, *Reasons against a War with France*. As Defoe had for nearly a year been zealously working the public mind to a warlike pitch, this title is at first surprising, but the surprise disappears when we find that the pamphlet is an ingenious plea for beginning with a declaration of war against Spain, showing that not only was there just cause for such a war, but that it would be extremely profitable, inasmuch as it would afford occasion for plundering the Spaniards in the West Indies, and thereby making up for whatever losses our trade might suffer from the French privateers. And it was more than a mere plundering descent that Defoe had in view; his object was that England should take actual possession of the Spanish Indies, and so rob Spain of its chief source of wealth. There was a most powerful buccaneering spirit concealed under the peaceful title of this pamphlet. The trick of arresting attention by an unexpected thesis, such as this promise of reasons for peace when everybody was dreaming of war, is an art in which Defoe has never been surpassed. As we shall have occasion to see, he practised it more than once too often for his comfort.



## CHAPTER III.

## A MARTYR TO DISSENT ?

FROM the death of the King in March, 1702, we must date a change in Defoe's relations with the ruling powers. Under William, his position as a political writer had been distinct and honourable. He supported William's policy warmly and straightforwardly, whether he divined it by his own judgment, or learned it by direct or indirect instructions or hints. When charged with writing for a place, he indignantly denied that he held either place or pension at Court, but at another time he admitted that he had been employed by the King and rewarded by him beyond his deserts. Any reward that he received for his literary services was well earned, and there was nothing dishonourable in accepting it. For concealing the connexion while the King was alive, he might plead the custom of the time. But in the confusion of parties and the uncertainty of government that followed William's death, Defoe slid into practices which cannot be justified by any standard of morality.

It was by accident that Defoe drifted into this equivocal position. His first writings under the new reign were in staunch consistency with what he had written before. He did not try to flatter the Queen as many others did by slighting her predecessors ; on the contrary, he wrote a poem called *The Mock Mourners*, in which he extolled "the glorious memory"—a phrase which he did much to bring into use—and charged those who spoke disrespectfully of William with the vilest insolence and ingratitude. He sang the praises of the Queen also, but as he based his joy at her accession on an assurance that she would follow in William's footsteps, the compliment might be construed as an exhortation. Shortly afterwards, in another poem, *The Spanish Descent*, he took his revenge upon the fleet for not carrying out his West Indian scheme by ridiculing unmercifully their first fruitless cruise on the Spanish coast, taking care at the same time to exult in the capture of the galleons at Vigo. In yet another poem—the success of the *True-Born Englishman* seems to have misguided him into the belief that he had a genius for verse—he reverted to the Reformation of Manners, and angered the Dissenters by belabouring certain magistrates of their denomination. A pamphlet entitled *A New Test of the Church of England's Loyalty*—in which he twitted the High Church party with being neither more nor less loyal than the Dissenters, inasmuch as they consented to the deposition of James and acquiesced in the accession of Anne—was better received by his co-religionists.

But when the Bill to prevent occasional conformity was introduced by some hot-headed partisans of the High Church, towards the close

of 1702, with the Queen's warm approval, Defoe took a course which made the Dissenters threaten to cast him altogether out of the synagogue. We have already seen how Defoe had taken the lead in attacking the practice of occasional conformity. While his co-religionists were imprecating him as the man who had brought this persecution upon them, Defoe added to their ill-feeling by issuing a jaunty pamphlet in which he proved with provoking unanswerableness that all honest Dissenters were noways concerned in the Bill. Nobody, he said, with his usual bright audacity, but himself, "who was altogether born in sin," saw the true scope of the measure. "All those people who designed the Act as a blow to the Dissenting interests in England are mistaken. All those who take it as a prelude or introduction to the further suppressing of the Dissenters, and a step to repealing the Toleration, or intend it as such, are mistaken. . . . All those phlegmatic Dissenters who fancy themselves undone, and that persecution and desolation is at the door again, are mistaken. All those Dissenters who are really at all disturbed at it, either as an advantage gained by their enemies or as a real disaster upon themselves, are mistaken. All those Dissenters who deprecate it as a judgment, or would vote against it as such if it were in their power, are mistaken." In short, though he did not suppose that the movers of the Bill "did it in mere kindness to the Dissenters, in order to refine and purge them from the scandals which some people had brought upon them," nevertheless it was calculated to effect this object. The Dissenter, being a man that was "something desirous of going to Heaven," ventured the displeasure of the civil magistrate at the command of his conscience, which warned him that there were things in the Established form of worship not agreeable to the Will of God as revealed in Scripture. There is nothing in the Act to the prejudice of this Dissenter; it affects only the Politic Dissenter, or State Dissenter, who, if he can attend the Established worship without offending his conscience, has no cause to be a Dissenter. An act against occasional conformity would rid the Dissenting body of these lukewarm members, and the riddance would be a good thing for all parties.

It may have been that this cheerful argument, the legitimate development of Defoe's former writings on the subject, was intended to comfort his co-religionists at a moment when the passing of the Act seemed certain. They did not view it in that light; they resented it bitterly, as an insult in the hour of their misfortune from the man who had shown their enemies where to strike. When, however, the Bill, after passing the Commons, was opposed and modified by the Lords, Defoe suddenly appeared on a new tack, publishing the most famous of his political pamphlets, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, which has, by a strange freak of circumstances, gained him the honour of being enshrined as one of the martyrs of Dissent. In the "brief explanation" of the pamphlet which he gave afterwards,

he declared that it had no bearing whatever upon the Occasional Conformity Bill, pointing to his former writings on the subject, in which he had denounced the practice, and welcomed the Bill as a useful instrument for purging the Dissenting bodies of half-and-half professors. It was intended, he said, as a banter upon the High-flying Tory Churchmen, putting into plain English the drift of their furious invectives against the Dissenters, and so, "by an irony not unusual," answering them out of their own mouths.

The *Shortest Way* is sometimes spoken of as a piece of exquisite irony, and on the other hand Mr. Saintsbury\* has raised the question whether the representation of an extreme case, in which the veil is never lifted from the writer's own opinions, can properly be called irony at all. This last is, perhaps, a question belonging to the strict definition of the figures of speech; but, however that might be settled, it is a mistake to describe Defoe's art in this pamphlet as delicate. There are no subtle strokes of wit in it such as we find in some of Swift's ironical pieces. Incomparably more effective as an engine of controversy, it is not entitled to the same rank as a literary exercise. Its whole merit and its rousing political force lay in the dramatic genius with which Defoe personated the temper of a thorough-going High-flyer, putting into plain and spirited English such sentiments as a violent partisan would not dare to utter except in the unguarded heat of familiar discourse, or the half-humorous ferocity of intoxication. Have done, he said, addressing the Dissenters, with this cackle about Peace and Union, and the Christian duties of moderation, which you raise now that you find "your day is over, your power gone, and the throne of this nation possessed by a Royal, English, true, and ever-constant member of and friend to the Church of England. . . . We have heard none of this lesson for fourteen years past. We have been huffed and bullied with your Act of Toleration; you have told us that you are the Church established by law as well as others; have set up your canting synagogues at our Church doors, and the Church and members have been loaded with reproaches, with oaths, associations, abjurations, and what not. Where has been the mercy, the forbearance, the charity, you have shown to tender consciences of the Church of England, that could not take oaths as fast as you made them; that, having sworn allegiance to their lawful and rightful King, could not dispense with that oath, their King being still alive, and swear to your new hodge-podge of a Dutch constitution? . . . Now that the tables are turned upon you, you must not be persecuted; 'tis not a Christian spirit." You talk of persecution; what persecution have you to complain of? "The first execution of the laws against Dissenters in England was in

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\* In an admirable article on Defoe in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.



the days of King James I. And what did it amount to? Truly the worst they suffered was at their own request to let them go to New England and erect a new colony, and give them great privileges, grants, and suitable powers, keep them under protection, and defend them against all invaders, and receive no taxes or revenue from them. This was the cruelty of the Church of England—fatal lenity! 'Twas the ruin of that excellent prince, King Charles I. Had King James sent all the Puritans in England away to the West Indies, we had been a national, unmixed Church; the Church of England had been kept undivided and entire. To requite the lenity of the father, they take up arms against the son; conquer, pursue, take, imprison, and at last put to death the Anointed of God, and destroy the very being and nature of government, setting up a sordid impostor, who had neither title to govern, nor understanding to manage, but supplied that want with power, bloody and desperate councils, and craft, without conscience." How leniently had King Charles treated these barbarous regicides, coming in all mercy and love, cherishing them, preferring them, giving them employment in his service. As for King James, "as if mercy was the inherent quality of the family, he began his reign with unusual favour to them, nor could their joining with the Duke of M<sup>on</sup>mouth against him move him to do himself justice upon them, but that mistaken prince thought to win them by gentleness and love, proclaimed a universal liberty to them, and rather discountenanced the Church of England than them. How they requited him all the world knows." Under King William, "a king of their own," they "crope into all places of trust and profit," engrossed the ministry and insulted the Church. But they must not expect this kind of thing to continue. "No, gentlemen, the time of mercy is past; your day of grace is over; you should have practised peace, and moderation, and charity, if you expected any yourselves."

In this heroic strain the pamphlet proceeds, reaching at length the suggestion "that if one severe law were made, and punctually executed, that whoever was found at a conventicle should be banished the nation, and the preacher be hanged, we would soon see an end of the tale—they would all come to church, and one age would make us all one again." That was the mock churchman's shortest way for the suppression of Dissent. He supported his argument by referring to the success with which Louis XIV. had put down the Huguenots. There was no good in half-measures, fines of five shillings a month for not coming to the Sacrament, and one shilling a week for not coming to church. It was vain to expect compliance from such trifling. "The light, foolish handling of them by mulets, fines, etc., 'tis their glory and their advantage. If the gallows instead of the counter, and the galleys instead of the fines, were the reward of going to a conventicle, to preach or hear, there would not be so many sufferers—the spirit of martyrdom is over. They that

will go to church to be chosen sheriffs and mayors, would go to forty churches rather than be hanged." "Now let us crucify the thieves," said the author of this truculent advice, in conclusion. "And may God Almighty put it into the hearts of all friends of truth to lift up a standard against pride and Antichrist, that the posterity of the sons of error may be rooted out from the face of this land for ever."

Defoe's disguise was so complete, his caricature of the ferocious High-flier so near to life, that at first people doubted whether the *Shortest Way* was the work of a satirist or a fanatic. When the truth leaked out, as it soon did, the Dissenters were hardly better pleased than while they feared that the proposal was serious. With the natural timidity of the precariously situated minorities, they could not enter into the humour of it. The very title was enough to make them shrink and tremble. The only people who were really in a position to enjoy the jest were the Whigs. The High-Churchmen, some of whom, it is said, were at first so far taken in as to express their warm approval, were furious when they discovered the trick that had been played upon them. The Tory ministers of the Queen felt themselves bound to take proceedings against the author, whose identity seems to have soon become an open secret. Learning this, Defoe went into concealment. A proclamation offering a reward for his discovery was advertised in the *Gazette*. The description of the fugitive is interesting; it is the only extant record of Defoe's personal appearance, except the portrait prefixed to his collected works, in which the mole is faithfully reproduced:—

"He is a middle-aged, spare man, about forty years old, of a brown complexion, and dark-brown coloured hair, but wears a wig; a hooked nose, a sharp chin, grey eyes, and a large mole near his mouth: was born in London, and for many years was a hose-factor in Freeman's Yard in Cornhill, and now is the owner of the brick and pantile works near Tilbury Fort in Essex."

This advertisement was issued on the 10th of January, 1703. Meantime the printer and the publisher were seized. From his safe hiding Defoe put forth an explanation, protesting, as we have seen, that his pamphlet had not the least retrospect to or concern in the public bills in Parliament now depending, or any other proceeding of either House or of the Government relating to the Dissenters, whose occasional conformity the author has constantly opposed. It was merely, he pleaded, the cant of the Non-juring party exposed; and he mentioned several printed books in which the same objects were expressed, though not in words so plain, and at length. But the Government would not take this view; he had represented virulent partisans as being supreme in the Queen's counsels, and his design was manifest "to blacken the Church party as men of a persecuting spirit, and to prepare the mob for what further service he had for them to do." Finding that they would not listen to him, Defoe surrendered himself, in order that others might not suffer



for his offence. He was indicted on the 24th of February. On the 25th the *Shortest Way* was brought under the notice of the House of Commons, and ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. His trial came on in July. He was found guilty of a seditious libel, and sentenced to pay a fine of 200 marks to the Queen, stand three times in the pillory, be imprisoned during the Queen's pleasure, and find sureties for his good behaviour for seven years.

Defoe complained that three Dissenting ministers, whose poor he had fed in the days of his prosperity, had refused to visit him during his confinement in Newgate. There was, doubtless, a want of charity in their action, but there also was a want of honesty in his complaint. If he applied for their spiritual ministrations, they had considerable reason for treating his application as a piece of provoking effrontery. Though Defoe was in prison for this banter upon the High-fliers, it is a mistake to regard him as a martyr, except by accident, to the cause of Toleration as we understand it now, and as the Dissenters bore the brunt of the battle for it then. Before his trial and conviction, while he lay in prison, he issued an exposition of his views of a fair Toleration in a tract entitled *The Shortest Way to Peace and Union*. The toleration which he advised, and which commended itself to the moderate Whigs with whom he had acted under King William and was probably acting now, was a purely spiritual Toleration. His proposal, in fact, was identical with that of Charles Leslie's in the *New Association*, one of the pamphlets which he professed to take off in his famous squib. Leslie had proposed that the Dissenters should be excluded from all civil employments, and should be forced to remain content with liberty of worship. Addressing the Dissenters, Defoe, in effect, urged them to anticipate forcible exclusion by voluntary withdrawal. Extremes on both sides should be industriously crushed and discouraged, and the extremes on the Dissenting side were those who, not being content to worship after their own fashion, had also a hankering after the public service. It is the true interest of the Dissenters in England, Defoe argued, to be governed by a Church of England magistracy; and with his usual paradoxical hardihood, he told his co-religionists bluntly that "the first reason of his proposition was that they were not qualified to be trusted with the government of themselves." When we consider the active part Defoe himself took in public affairs, we shall not be surprised that offence was given by his countenancing the civil disabilities of Dissenters, and that the Dissenting preachers declined to recognise him as properly belonging to their body. It was not, indeed, as a Dissenter that Defoe was prosecuted by the violent Tories, then in power, but as the suspected literary instrument of the great Whig leaders.

This, of course, in no way diminishes the harsh and spiteful im-

policy of the sentence passed on Defoe. Its terms were duly put in execution. The offending satirist stood in the pillory on the three last days of July, 1703, before the Royal Exchange in Cornhill, near the Conduit in Cheapside, and at Temple Bar. It is incorrect, however, to say with Pope that

“ Earless on high stood unabashed Defoe.”

His ears were not cropped, as the barbarous phrase went, and he had no reason to be abashed. His reception by the mob was very different from that accorded to the anti-Jacobite Fuller, a scurrilous rogue who had tried to make a few pounds by a Plain Proof that the Chevalier was a supposititious child. The author of the *True-Born Englishman* was a popular favourite, and his exhibition in the pillory was an occasion of triumph and not of ignominy to him. A ring of admirers was formed round the place of punishment, and bunches of flowers instead of handfuls of garbage were thrown at the criminal. Tankards of ale and stoups of wine were drunk in his honour by the multitude whom he had delighted with his racy verse and charmed by his bold defiance of the authorities.

The enthusiasm was increased by the timely publication of a *Hymn to the Pillory*, in which Defoe boldly declared the iniquity of his sentence, and pointed out to the Government more proper objects of their severity. Atheists ought to stand there, he said, profligate beaux, swindling stock-jobbers, fanatic Jacobites, and the commanders who had brought the English fleet into disgrace. As for him, his only fault lay in his not being understood; but he was perhaps justly punished for being such a fool as to trust his meaning to irony. It would seem that though the Government had committed Defoe to Newgate, they did not dare, even before the manifestation of popular feeling in his favour, to treat him as a common prisoner. He not only had liberty to write, but he found means to convey his manuscripts to the printer. Of these privileges he had availed himself with that indomitable energy and fertility of resource which we find reason to admire at every stage in his career, and most of all now that he was in straits. In the short interval between his arrest and his conviction he carried on a vigorous warfare with both hands, —with one hand seeking to propitiate the Government, with the other attracting support outside among the people. He proved to the Government incontestably, by a collection of his writings, that he was a man of moderate views, who had no aversion in principle even to the proposals of the *New Association*. He proved the same thing to the people at large by publishing this *Collection of the writings of the author of the True-Born Englishman*, but he accompanied the proof by a lively appeal to their sympathy under the title of *More Reformation, a Satire on himself*, a lament over his own folly which was calculated to bring pressure on the Government against prose-

cuting a man so innocent of public wrong. When, in spite of his efforts, a conviction was recorded against him, he adopted a more defiant tone towards the Government. He wrote the *Hymn to the Pillory*. This daring effusion was hawked in the streets among the crowd that had assembled to witness his penance in the

“hierozlyphic State-machine,  
Contrived to pnnish fancy in.”

“Come,” he cried, in the concluding lines—

“Tell 'em the M—— that placed him here  
Are Sc——ls to the times,  
Are at a loss to find his guilt.  
And can't commit his crimes.”

“M——” stands for Men, and “Sc——ls” for Scandals. Defoe delighted in this odd use of methods of reserve, more common in his time than in ours.

The dauntless courage of Defoe's *Hymn to the Pillory* can only be properly appreciated when we remember with what savage outrage it was the custom of the mob to treat those who were thus exposed to make a London holiday. From the pillory he was taken back to Newgate, there to be imprisoned during her Majesty's pleasure. His confinement must have been much less disagreeable to him than it would have been to one of less hardy temperament. Defoe was not the man to shrink with loathing from the companionship of thieves, highwaymen, forgers, coiners, and pirates. Curiosity was a much stronger power with him than disgust. Newgate had something of the charm for Defoe that a hospital full of hideous diseases has for an enthusiastic surgeon. He spent many pleasant hours in listening to the tales of his adventurous fellow-prisoners. Besides, the Government did not dare to deprive him of the liberty of writing and publishing. This privilege enabled him to appeal to the public, whose ear he had gained in the character of an undismayed martyr, an enjoyment which to so buoyant a man must have compensated for a great deal of irksome suffering. He attributed the failure of his pantile works at Tilbury to his removal from the management of them; but bearing in mind the amount of success that had attended his efforts when he was free, it is fair to suppose that he was not altogether sorry for the excuse. It was by no means the intention of his High-Church persecutors that Defoe should enjoy himself in Newgate, and he himself lamented loudly the strange reverse by which he had passed within a few months from the closet of a king to a prisoner's cell; but on the whole he was probably as happy in Newgate as he had been at Whitehall. His wife and six children were most to be commiserated, and their distress was his heaviest trial.

The first use which Defoe made of his pen after his exhibition in



the pillory was to reply to a Dissenting minister who had justified the practice of occasional conformity. He thereby marked once more his separation from the extreme Dissenters, who were struggling against having their religion made a disqualification for offices of public trust. But in the changes of parties at Court he soon found a reason for marking his separation from the opposite extreme, and facing the other way. Under the influence of the moderate Tories, Marlborough, Godolphin, and their invaluable ally, the Duchess, the Queen was gradually losing faith in the violent Tories. According to Swift, she began to dislike her bosom friend, Mrs. Freeman, from the moment of her accession, but though she may have chafed under the yoke of her favourite, she could not at once shake off the domination of that imperious will. The Duchess, finding the extreme Tories unfavourable to the war in which her husband's honour and interests were deeply engaged, became a hot partisan against them, and used all their blunders to break down their power at Court. Day by day she impressed upon the Queen the necessity of peace and union at home in the face of the troubles abroad. The moderate men of both parties must be rallied round the throne. Extremes on both sides must be discouraged. Spies were set to work to take note of such rash expressions among the "hot and angry men" as would be likely to damage them in the Queen's favour. Queen Anne had not a little of the quiet tenacity and spitefulness of enfeebled constitutions, but in the end reason prevailed, resentment at importunity was overcome, and the hold of the High-Churchmen on her affections gave way.

Nobody, Swift has told us, could better disguise her feelings than the Queen. The first intimation which the High-Church party had of her change of views was her opening speech to Parliament on the 9th November, 1703, in which she earnestly desired parties in both Houses to avoid heats and divisions. Defoe at once threw himself in front of the rising tide. Whether he divined for himself that the influence of the Earl of Nottingham, the Secretary of State, to whom he owed his prosecution and imprisonment, was waning, or obtained a hint to that effect from his Whig friends, we do not know, but he lost no time in issuing from his prison a bold attack upon the High-Churchmen. In his *Challenge of Peace, addressed to the whole Nation*, he denounced them as Church Vultures and Ecclesiastical Harpies. It was they and not the Dissenters that were the prime movers of strife and dissension. How are peace and union to be obtained, he asks. He will show people first how peace and union cannot be obtained.

"First, Sacheverell's Bloody Flag of Defiance is not the way to Peace and Union. *The shortest way to destroy is not the shortest way to unite.* Persecution, Laws to Compel, Restrain or force the Conscience of one another, is not the way to this Union, which her Majesty has so earnestly recommended.

"Secondly, to repeal or contract the late Act of Toleration is not the way for this so much wished-for happiness; to have laws revived that should set one party at

plundering, excommunicating and unchurching another, that should renew the oppressions and devastations of late reigns, this will not by any means contribute to this Peace, which all good men desire.

"New Associations and proposals to divest men of their freehold right for differences in opinion, and take away the right of Dissenters voting in elections of Members : this is not the way to Peace and Union.

"Railing pamphlets, buffooning our brethren as a party to be suppressed, and dressing them up in the Bear's skin for all the dogs in the street to bait them, is not the way to Peace and Union.

"Railing sermons, exciting people to hatred and contempt of their brethren, because they differ in opinions, is not the way to Peace and Union.

"Shutting all people out of employment and the service of their Prince and Country, unless they can comply with indifferent ceremonies of religion, is far from the way to Peace and Union.

"Reproaching the Succession settled by Parliament, and reviving the abdicated title of the late King James, and his supposed family, cannot tend to this Peace and Union.

"Laws against Occasional Conformity, and compelling people who bear offices to a total conformity, and yet force them to take and serve in those public employments, cannot contribute to this Peace and Union."

In this passage Defoe seems to ally himself more closely with his Dissenting brethren than he had done before. It was difficult for him, with his published views on the objectionableness of occasional conformity, and the propriety of Dissenters leaving the magistracy in the hands of the Church, to maintain his new position without incurring the charge of inconsistency. The charge was freely made, and his own writings were collected as a testimony against him, but he met the charge boldly. The Dissenters ought not to practise occasional conformity, but if they could reconcile it with their conscience, they ought not to receive temporal punishment for practising it. The Dissenters ought to withdraw from the magistracy, but it was persecution to exclude them. In tract after tract of brilliant and trenchant argument, he upheld these views, with his usual courage attacking most fiercely those antagonists who went most nearly on the lines of his own previous writings. Ignoring what he had said before, he now proved clearly that the Occasional Conformity Bill was a breach of the Act of Toleration. There was little difference between his own *Shortest Way to Peace and Union* and Sir Humphrey Mackworth's *Peace at Home*, but he assailed the latter pamphlet vigorously, and showed that it had been the practice in all countries for Dissenters from the established religion to have a share in the business of the State. At the same time he never departed so far from the "moderate" point of view, as to insist that Dissenters ought to be admitted to a share in the business of the State. Let the High-Church ministers be dismissed, and moderate men summoned to the Queen's councils, and the Dissenters would have every reason to be content. They would acquiesce with pleasure in a ministry and magistracy of Low-Churchmen.

Defoe's assaults upon the High-Church Tories were neither interdicted nor resented by the Government, though he lay in prison at

their mercy. Throughout the winter of 1703-4 the extreme members of the Ministry, though they had still a majority in the House of Commons, felt the Queen's coldness increase. Their former high place in her regard and their continued hold upon Parliament tempted them to assume airs of independence which gave deeper offence than her unruffled courtesy led either them or their rivals to suspect. At last the crisis came. The Earl of Nottingham took the rash step of threatening to resign unless the Whig Dukes of Somerset and Devonshire were dismissed from the Cabinet. To his surprise and chagrin, his resignation was accepted (1704), and two more of his party were dismissed from office at the same time.

The successor of Nottingham was Robert Harley, afterwards created Earl of Oxford and Mortimer. He gave evidence late in life of his love for literature by forming the collection of manuscripts known as the Harleian, and we know from Swift that he was deeply impressed with the importance of having allies in the Press. He entered upon office in May, 1704, and one of his first acts was to convey to Defoe the message, "Pray, ask that gentleman what I can do for him." Defoe replied by likening himself to the blind man in the parable, and paraphrasing his prayer, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" He would not seem to have obtained his liberty immediately, but, through Harley's influence, he was set free towards the end of July or the beginning of August. The Queen also, he afterwards said, "was pleased particularly to inquire into his circumstances and family, and by Lord Treasurer Godolphin to send a considerable supply to his wife and family, and to send him to the prison money to pay his fine and the expenses of his discharge."

On what condition was Defoe released? On condition, according to the *Elegy on the Author of the True-Born Englishman*, which he published immediately after his discharge, that he should keep silence for seven years, or at least "not write what some people might not like." To the public he represented himself as a martyr grudgingly released by the Government, and restrained from attacking them only by his own bond and the fear of legal penalties.

"Memento Mori here I stand,  
With silent lips but speaking hand,  
A walking shadow of a Poet,  
But bound to hold my tongue and never show it.  
A monument of injury,  
A sacrifice to legal tyranny."

"For shame, gentlemen," he humorously cries to his enemies; "do not strike a dead man; beware, scribblers, of fathering your pasquinades against authority upon me; for seven years the True-Born Englishman is tied under sureties and penalties not to write.

"To seven long years of silence I betake,  
Perhaps by then I may forget to speak;"



This elegy he has been permitted to publish as his last speech and dying confession—

“When malefactors come to die,  
They claim uncommon liberty :  
Freedom of speech gives no distaste,  
They let them talk at large, because they talk their last.”

The public could hardly have supposed from this what Defoe afterwards admitted to have been the true state of the case, namely, that on leaving prison he was taken into the service of the Government. He obtained an appointment, that is to say a pension, from the Queen, and was employed on secret services. When charged afterwards with having written by Harley's instructions, he denied this, but admitted the existence of certain “capitulations,” in which he stipulated for liberty to write according to his own judgment, guided only by a sense of gratitude to his benefactor. There is reason to believe that even this is not the whole truth. Documents which Mr. Lee recently brought to light make one suspect that Defoe was all the time in private relations with the leaders of the Whig party. Of this more falls to be said in another place. The True-Born Englishman was, indeed, dead. Defoe was no longer the straightforward advocate of King William's policy. He was engaged henceforward in serving two masters, persuading each that he served him alone, and persuading the public, in spite of numberless insinuations, that he served nobody but them and himself, and wrote simply as a free lance under the jealous sufferance of the Government of the day.

I must reserve for a separate chapter some account of Defoe's greatest political work, which he began while he still lay in Newgate, the *Review*. Another work which he wrote and published at the same period deserves attention on different grounds. His history of the great storm of November, 1703, *A Collection of the most remarkable Casualties and Disasters which happened in the late Dreadful Tempest, both by Sea and Land*, may be set down as the first of his works of invention. It is a most minute and circumstantial record, containing many letters from eye-witnesses of what happened in their immediate neighbourhood. Defoe could have seen little of the storm himself from the interior of Newgate, but it is possible that the letters are genuine, and that he compiled other details from published accounts. Still, we are justified in suspecting that his annals of the storm are no more authentic history than his *Journal of the Plague*, or his *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and that for many of the incidents he is equally indebted to his imagination.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE REVIEW OF THE AFFAIRS OF FRANCE.

It was a bold undertaking for a prisoner in Newgate to engage to furnish a newspaper written wholly by himself, "purged from the errors and partiality of news-writers and petty statesmen of all sides." It would, of course, have been an impossible undertaking if the *Review* had been, either in size or in contents, like a newspaper of the present time. The *Review* was, in its first stage, a sheet of eight small quarto pages. After the first two numbers, it was reduced in size to four pages, but a smaller type was used, so that the amount of matter remained nearly the same—about equal in bulk to two modern leading articles. At first the issue was weekly; after four numbers, it became bi-weekly, and so remained for a year.

For the character of the *Review* it is difficult to find a parallel. There was nothing like it at the time, and nothing exactly like it has been attempted since. The nearest approach to it among its predecessors was the *Observer*, a small weekly journal written by the erratic John Tutchin, in which passing topics, political and social, were discussed in dialogues. Personal scandals were a prominent feature in the *Observer*. Defoe was not insensible to the value of this element to a popular journal. He knew, he said, that people liked to be amused; and he supplied this want in a section of his paper entitled "Mercure Scandale; or, Advice from the Scandalous Club, being a weekly history of Nonsense, Impertinence, Vice, and Debauchery." Under this attractive heading, Defoe noticed current scandals, his club being represented as a tribunal before which offenders were brought, their cases heard, and sentence passed upon them. Slanderers of the True-Born Englishman frequently figure in its proceedings. It was in this section also that Defoe exposed the errors of contemporary news-writers, the *Postman*, the *Post-Boy*, the *London Post*, the *Flying Post*, and the *Daily Courant*. He could not in his prison pretend to superior information regarding the events of the day; the errors which he exposed were chiefly blunders in geography and history. The *Mercure Scandale* was avowedly intended to amuse the frivolous. The lapse of time has made its artificial sprightliness dreary. It was in the serious portion of the *Review*, the *Review* proper, that Defoe showed most of his genius. The design of this was nothing less than to give a true picture, drawn with "an impartial and exact historical pen," of the domestic and foreign affairs of all the States of Europe. It was essential, he thought, that at such a time of commotion Englishmen should be thoroughly informed of the strength and the political interests and proclivities of the various European Powers. He could not undertake to tell his readers what



was passing from day to day, but he could explain to them the policy of the Continental Courts ; he could show how that policy was affected by their past history and present interests ; he could calculate the forces at their disposal, set forth the grounds of their alliances, and generally put people in a position to follow the great game that was being played on the European chess-board. In the *Review*, in fact, as he himself described his task, he was writing a history sheet by sheet, and letting the world see it as it went on.

This excellent plan of instruction was carried out with incomparable brilliancy of method and vivacity of style. Defoe was thoroughly master of his subject ; he had read every history that he could lay his hands on, and his connection with King William had guided him to the mainsprings of political action, and fixed in his mind clear principles for England's foreign policy. Such a mass of facts and such a maze of interests would have encumbered and perplexed a more commonplace intellect, but Defoe handled them with experienced and buoyant ease. He had many arts for exciting attention. His confinement in Newgate, from which the first number of the *Review* was issued on the 19th February, 1704, had in no way impaired his clear-sighted daring and self-confident skill. There was a sparkle of paradox and a significant lesson in the very title of his journal—*A Review of the Affairs of France*. When, by and by, he digressed to the affairs of Sweden and Poland, and filled number after number with the history of Hungary, people kept asking, "What has this to do with France?" "How little you understand my design," was Defoe's retort. "Patience, till my work is completed, and then you will see that, however much I may seem to have been digressing, I have always kept strictly to the point. Do not judge me as you judged St. Paul's before the roof was put on. It is not affairs in France that I have undertaken to explain, but the affairs of France ; and the affairs of France are the affairs of Europe. So great is the power of the French money, the artifice of their conduct, the terror of their arms, that they can bring the greatest kings in Europe to promote their interest and grandeur at the expense of their own."

Defoe delighted to brave common prejudice by throwing full in its face paradoxes expressed in the most unqualified language. While we were at war with France, and commonplace hunters after popularity were doing their utmost to flatter the national vanity, Defoe boldly announced his intention of setting forth the wonderful greatness of the French nation, the enormous numbers of their armies, the immense wealth of their Treasury, the marvellous vigour of their administration. He ridiculed loudly those writers who pretended that we should have no difficulty in beating them, and filled their papers with dismal stories about the poverty and depopulation of the country. "Consider the armies that the French King has raised," cried Defoe, "and the reinforcements and subsidies he has sent to the

King of Spain ; does that look like a depopulated country and an impoverished exchequer?" It was perhaps a melancholy fact, but what need to apologise for telling the truth? At once, of course, a shout was raised against him for want of patriotism ; he was a French pensioner, a Jacobite, a hireling of the Peace-party. This was the opportunity on which the chuckling paradox-monger had counted. He protested that he was not drawing a map of the French power to terrify the English. But, he said, "there are two cheats equally hurtful to us ; the first to terrify us, the last to make us too easy and consequently too secure ; 'tis equally dangerous for us to be terrified into despair and bullied into more terror of our enemies than we need, or to be so exalted in conceit of our own force as to undervalue and condemn the power which we cannot reduce." To blame him for making clear the greatness of the French power, was to act as if the Romans had killed the geese in the Capitol for frightening them out of their sleep. "If I, like an honest Protestant goose, have gaggled too loud of the French power, and raised the country, the French indeed may have reason to cut my throat if they could ; but 'tis hard my own countrymen, to whom I have shown their danger, and whom I have endeavoured to wake out of their sleep, should take offence at the timely discovery."

If we open the first volume, or indeed any volume of the *Review*, at random, we are almost certain to meet with some electric shock of paradox designed to arouse the attention of the torpid. In one number we find the writer, ever daring and alert, setting out with an eulogium on "the wonderful benefit of arbitrary power" in France. He runs on in this vein for some time, accumulating examples of the wonderful benefit, till the patience of his liberty-loving readers is sufficiently exasperated, and then he turns round with a grin of mockery and explains that he means benefit to the monarch, not to the subject. "If any man ask me what are the benefits of arbitrary power to the subject, I answer these two, *poverty* and *subjection*." But to an ambitious monarch unlimited power is a necessity ; unless he can count upon instant obedience to his will, he only courts defeat if he embarks in schemes of aggression and conquest.

"When a Prince must court his subjects to give him leave to raise an army, and when that's done, tell him when he must disband them ; that if he wants money, he must assemble the States of his country, and not only give them good words to get it, and tell them what 'tis for, but give them an account how it is expended before he asks for more. The subjects in such a government are certainly happy in having their property and privileges secured, but if I were of his Privy Council, I would advise such a Prince to content himself within the compass of his own Government, and never think of invading his neighbours or increasing his dominions, for subjects who stipulate with their Princes, and make conditions of government, who claim to be governed by laws and make those laws themselves, who need not pay their money but when they see cause, and may refuse to pay it when demanded without their consent ; such subjects will never empty their purses upon foreign wars for enlarging the glory of their sovereign."

This glory he describes as "the leaf-gold which the devil has laid over the backside of ambition, to make it glitter to the world."

Defoe's knowledge of the irritation caused among the Dissenters by his *Shortest Way*, did not prevent him from shocking them and annoying the high Tories by similar *jeux d'esprit*. He had no tenderness for the feelings of such of his brethren as had not his own robust sense of humour and boyish glee in the free handling of dangerous weapons. Thus we find him, among his eulogies of the Grand Monarque, particularly extolling him for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. By the expulsion of the Protestants, Louis impoverished and unpeopled part of his country, but it was "the most politic action the French King ever did." "I don't think fit to engage here in a dispute about the honesty of it," says Defoe; "but till he had first cleared the country of that numerous injured people, he could never have ventured to carry an offensive war into all the borders of Europe." And Defoe was not content with shocking the feelings of his nominal co-religionists by a light treatment of matters in which he agreed with them. He upheld with all his might the opposite view from theirs on two important questions of foreign policy. While the Confederates were doing battle on all sides against France, the King of Sweden was making war on his own account against Poland for the avowed purpose of placing a Protestant prince on the throne. Extreme Protestants in England were disposed to think that Charles XII. was fighting the Lord's battle in Poland. But Defoe was strongly of opinion that the work in which all Protestants ought at that moment to be engaged was breaking down the power of France, and as Charles refused to join the Confederacy, and the Catholic prince against whom he was fighting was a possible adherent, the ardent preacher of union among the Protestant powers insisted upon regarding him as a practical ally of France, and urged that the English fleet should be sent into the Baltic to interrupt his communications. Disunion among Protestants, argued Defoe, was the main cause of French greatness; if the Swedish King would not join the Confederacy of his own free will, he should be compelled to join it, or at least to refrain from weakening it.

Defoe treated the revolt of the Hungarians against the Emperor with the same regard to the interests of the Protestant cause. Some uneasiness was felt in England at co-operating with an ally who so cruelly oppressed his Protestant subjects, and some scruple of conscience at seeming to countenance the oppression. Defoe fully admitted the wrongs of the Hungarians, but argued that this was not the time for them to press their claims for redress. He would not allow that they were justified at such a moment in calling in the aid of the Turks against the Emperor. "It is not enough that a nation be Protestant and the people our friends; if they will join with our enemies, they are Papists, Turks, and Heathens to us." "If the



Protestants in Hungary will make the Protestant religion in Hungary clash with the Protestant religion in all the rest of Europe, we must prefer the major interest to the minor." Defoe treats every foreign question from the cool high-political point of view, generally taking up a position from which he can expose the unreasonableness of both sides. In the case of the Cevennois insurgents, one party had used the argument that it was unlawful to encourage rebellion even among the subjects of a prince with whom we were at war. With this Defoe dealt in one article, proving with quite a superfluity of illustration that we were justified by all the precedents of recent history in sending support to the rebellious subjects of Louis XIV. It was the general custom of Europe to "assist the malcontents of our neighbours." Then in another article he considered whether, being lawful, it was also expedient, and he answered this in the negative, treating with scorn a passionate appeal for the Cevennois entitled "Europe enslaved if the Camisars are not relieved." "What nonsense is this," he cried, "about a poor despicable handful of men who have only made a little diversion in the great war!" "The haste these men are in to have that done which they cannot show us the way to do!" he cried; and proceeded to prove in a minute discussion of conceivable strategic movements that it was impossible for us in the circumstances to send the Camisards the least relief.

There is no reference in the *Review* to Defoe's release from prison. Two numbers a week were issued with the same punctuality before and after, and there is no perceptible difference either in tone or in plan. Before he left prison, and before the fall of the high Tory Ministers, he had thrown in his lot boldly with the moderate men, and he did not identify himself more closely with any political section after Harley and Godolphin recognised the value of his support and gave him liberty and pecuniary help. In the first number of the *Review* he had declared his freedom from party ties, and his unreserved adherence to truth and the public interest, and he made frequent protestations of this independence. "I am not a party man," he kept saying; "at least, I resolve this shall not be a party paper." In discussing the affairs of France, he took more than one side-glance homewards, but always with the protest that he had no interest to serve but that of his country. The absolute power of Louis, for example, furnished him with an occasion for lamenting the disunited counsels of Her Majesty's Cabinet. Without imitating the despotic form of the French-Government, he said, there are ways by which we might secure under our own forms greater decision and promptitude on the part of the Executive. When Nottingham was dismissed, he rejoiced openly, not because the ex-Secretary had been his prosecutor, but because at last there was unity of views among the Queen's Ministers. He joined naturally in the exultation over Marlborough's successes, but in the *Review*, and in his *Hymn to Victory*, separately pub-



lished, he courteously diverted some part of the credit to the new Ministry. "Her Majesty's measures, moved by new and polished councils, have been pointed more directly at the root of the French power than ever we have seen before. I hope no man will suppose I reflect on the memory of King William; I know 'tis impossible the Queen should more sincerely wish the reduction of France than his late Majesty; but if it is expected I should say he was not worse served, oftener betrayed, and consequently hurried into more mistakes and disasters, than her Majesty now is, this must be by somebody who believes I know much less of the public matters of those days than I had the honor to be informed of." But this praise, he represented, was not the praise of a partisan; it was an honest compliment wrung from a man whose only connexion with the Government was a bond for his good behaviour, an undertaking "not to write what some people might not like."

Defoe's hand being against every member of the writing brotherhood, it was natural that his reviews should not pass without severe criticisms. He often complained of the insults, ribaldry, Billingsgate, and Bear-garden language to which he was exposed; and some of his biographers have taken these lamentations seriously, and expressed their regret that so good a man should have been so much persecuted. But as he deliberately provoked these assaults, and never missed a chance of effective retort, it is difficult to sympathise with him on any ground but his manifest delight in the strife of tongues. Infinitely the superior of his antagonists in power, he could affect to treat them with good humour, but this good humour was not easy to reciprocate when combined with an imperturbable assumption that they were all fools or knaves. When we find him, after humbly asking pardon for all his errors of the press, errors of the pen, or errors of opinion, expressing a wish that "all gentlemen on the other side would give him equal occasion to honour them for their charity, temper, and gentlemanlike dealing, as for their learning and virtue," and offering to "capitulate with them, and enter into a treaty or cartel for exchange of good language," we may, if we like, admire his superior mastery of the weapons of irritation, but pity is out of place.

The number of February 17. 1705, was announced by Defoe as being "the last Review of this volume, and designed to be so of this work." But on the following Tuesday, the regular day for the appearance of the *Review*, he issued another number, declaring that he could not quit the volume without some remarks on "charity and poverty." On Saturday yet another last number appeared, dealing with some social subjects which he had been urged by correspondents to discuss. Then on Tuesday, February 27, apologising for the frequent turning of his design, he issued a Preface to a new volume of the *Review*, with a slight change of title. He would overtake sooner or later all the particulars of French greatness which he had promised to survey, but

as the course of his narrative had brought him to England, and he might stay there some time, it was as well that this should be indicated in the title, which was henceforth to be *A Review of the Affairs of France, with Observations on Affairs at Home*. He had intended, he said, to abandon the work altogether, but some gentlemen had prevailed with him to go on, and had promised that he should not be at a loss by it. It was now to be issued three times a week.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE ADVOCATE OF PEACE AND UNION.

IN putting forth the prospectus of the second volume of his *Review*, Defoe intimated that its prevailing topic would be the Trade of England—a vast subject, with many branches, all closely interwoven with one another and with the general well-being of the kingdom. It grieved him, he said, to see the nation involved in such evils while remedies lay at hand which blind guides could not, and wicked guides would not, see—trade decaying, yet within reach of the greatest improvements; the navy flourishing, yet fearfully mismanaged; rival factions brawling and fighting when they ought to combine for the common good. “Nothing could have induced him to undertake the ungrateful office of exposing these things, but the full persuasion that he was capable of convincing anything of an Englishman that had the least angle of his soul untainted with partiality, and that had the least concern left for the good of his country, that even the worst of these evils were easy to be cured; that if ever this nation were shipwrecked and undone, it must be at the very entrance of her port of deliverance, in the sight of her safety that Providence held out to her, in the sight of her safe establishment, a prosperous trade, a regular, easily-supplied navy, and a general reformation both in manners and methods in Church and State.”

Defoe began as usual by laying down various clear heads, under which he promised to deal with the whole field of trade. But as usual he did not adhere to this systematic plan. He discussed some topics of the day with brilliant force, and then he suddenly digressed to a subject only collaterally connected with trade. The Queen, in opening the session of 1704-5, had exhorted her Parliament to peace and union; but the High-Churchmen were too hot to listen to advice even from her. The Occasional Conformity Bill was again introduced and carried in the Commons. The Lords rejected it. The Commons persisted, and, to secure the passing of the measure, tacked it to a Bill of Supply. The Lords refused to pass the Money Bill till the tack was withdrawn. Soon afterwards the Parliament—Parlia-

ments were then triennial—was dissolved, and the canvass for a general election set in amidst unusual excitement. Defoe abandoned the quiet topic of trade, and devoted the *Review* to electioneering articles.

But he did not take a side, at least not a party side. He took the side of peace and his country. "I saw with concern," he said, in afterwards explaining his position, "the weighty juncture of a new election for members approach, the variety of wheels and engines set to work in the nation, and the furious methods to form interests on either hand and put the tempers of men on all sides into an unusual motion; and things seemed acted with so much animosity and party fury that I confess it gave me terrible apprehensions of the consequences." On both sides "the methods seemed to him very scandalous." "In many places most horrid and villanous practices were set on foot to supplant one another. The parties stooped to vile and unbecoming meannesses; infinite briberies, forgeries, perjuries, and all manners of debauchings of the principles and manners of the electors were attempted. All sorts of violences, tumults, riots, breaches of the peace, neighbourhood, and good manners were made use of to support interests and carry elections." In short, Defoe saw the nation "running directly on the steep precipice of confusion." In these circumstances, he seriously reflected what he should do. He came to the conclusion that he must "immediately set himself in the *Review* to exhort, persuade, entreat, and in the most moving terms he was capable of, prevail on all people in general to STUDY PEACE."

Under cover of this profession of impartiality, Defoe issued most effective attacks upon the High-Church party. In order to promote peace, he said, it was necessary to ascertain first of all who were the enemies of peace. On the surface, the questions at stake in the elections were the privileges of the Dissenters and the respective rights of the Lords and the Commons in the matter of Money Bills. But people must look beneath the surface. "King James, French power, and a general turn of affairs was at the bottom, and the quarrels between Church and Dissenters only a politic noose they had hooked the parties on both sides into." Defoe lashed the Tackers into fury by his exhortations to the study of peace. He professed the utmost good-will to them personally, though he had not words strong enough to condemn their conduct in tacking the Occasional Bill to a Money Bill when they knew that the Lords would reject it, and so in a moment of grave national peril leave the army without supplies. The Queen, in dissolving Parliament, had described this tacking as a dangerous experiment, and Defoe explained the experiment as being "whether losing the Money Bill, breaking up the Houses, disbanding the Confederacy, and opening the door to the French might not have been for the interest of the High Church." Far be it from him to use Billingsgate language to the Tackers, but



“the effect of their action, which, and not their motive, he had to consider, would undoubtedly be to let in the French, depose the Queen, bring in the Prince of Wales, abdicate the Protestant religion, restore Popery, repeal the Toleration, and persecute the Dissenters.” Still it was probable that the Tackers meant no harm. *Humanum est errare*. He was certain that if he showed them their error, they would repent and be converted. All the same, he could not recommend them to the electors. “A Tacker is a man of passion, a man of heat, a man that is for ruining the nation upon any hazards to obtain his ends. Gentlemen freeholders, you must not choose a Tacker, unless you will destroy our peace, divide our strength, pull down the Church, let in the French, and depose the Queen.”

From the dissolution of Parliament in April till the end of the year Defoe preached from this text with infinite variety and vigour. It is the chief subject of the second volume of the *Review*. The elections, powerfully influenced by Marlborough's successes as well as by the eloquent championship of Defoe, resulted in the entire defeat of the High Tories, and a further weeding of them out of high places in the Administration. Defoe was able to close this volume of the *Review* with expressions of delight at the attainment of the peace for which he had laboured, and, the victory being gained and the battle over, to promise a return to the intermitted subject of Trade. He returned to this subject in the beginning of his third volume. But he had not pursued it long when he was again called away. The second diversion, as he pointed out, was strictly analogous to the first. It was a summons to him to do his utmost to promote the union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland. “From the same zeal,” Defoe said, “with which I first pursued this blessed subject of peace, I found myself embarked in the future extent of it, I mean the Union. If I thought myself obliged in duty to the public interest to use my utmost endeavour to quiet the minds of enraged parties, I found myself under a stronger necessity to embark in the same design between two most enraged nations.”

The union of the two kingdoms had become an object of pressing and paramount importance towards the close of William's reign. He had found little difficulty in getting the English Parliament to agree to settle the succession of the House of Hanover, but the proposal that the succession to the throne of Scotland should be settled on the same head was coldly received by the Scottish Parliament. It was not so much that the politicians of Edinburgh were averse to a common settlement, or positively eager for a King and Court of their own, but they were resolved to hold back till they were assured of commercial privileges which would go to compensate them for the drain of wealth that was supposed to have followed the King southwards. This was the policy of the wiser heads, not to accept the Union without as advantageous terms as they could secure. They had lost an opportunity



at the Revolution, and were determined not to lose another. But among the mass of the population the feeling was all in favour of a separate kingdom. National animosity had been inflamed to a passionate pitch by the Darien disaster and the Massacre of Glencoe. The people listened readily to the insinuations of hot-headed men that the English wished to have everything their own way. The counter-charge about the Scotch found equally willing hearers among the mass in England. Never had cool-headed statesmen a harder task in preventing two nations from coming to blows. All the time that the Treaty of Union was being negotiated which King William had earnestly urged from his deathbed, throughout the first half of Queen Anne's reign, they worked under a continual apprehension lest the negotiations should end in a violent and irreconcilable rupture.

Defoe might well say that he was pursuing the same blessed subject of Peace in trying to reconcile these two most enraged nations, and writing with all his might for the Union. An Act enabling the Queen to appoint Commissioners on the English side to arrange the terms of the Treaty had been passed in the first year of her reign, but difficulties had arisen about the appointment of the Scottish Commissioners, and it was not till the spring of 1706 that the two Commissions came together. When they did at last meet, they found each other much more reasonable and practical in spirit than had appeared possible during the battle over the preliminaries. But while the statesmen sat concocting the terms of the Treaty almost amicably, from April to July, the excitement raged fiercely out of doors. Amidst the blaze of recriminations and counter-recriminations, Defoe moved energetically as the Apostle of Peace, making his *Review* play like a fireman's hose upon the flames. He did not try to persuade the Scotch to peace by the same methods which he had used in the case of the High-fliers and Tackers. His Reviews on this subject, full of spirit as ever, are models of the art of conciliation. He wrestled ardently with national prejudices on both sides, vindicating the Scotch Presbyterians from the charge of religious intolerance, labouring to prove that the English were not all to blame for the collapse of the Darien expedition and the Glencoe tragedy, expounding what was fair to both nations in matters concerning trade. Abuse was heaped upon him plentifully by hot partisans; he was charged with want of patriotism from the one side, and with too much of it from the other; but he held on his way manfully, allowing no blow from his aspersers to pass unreturned. Seldom has so bold and skilful a soldier been enlisted in the cause of peace.

Defoe was not content with the *Review* as a literary instrument of pacification. He carried on the war in both capitals, answering the pamphlets of the Scotch patriots with counter-pamphlets from the Edinburgh press. He published also a poem, "in honour of Scotland," entitled *Caledonia*, with an artfully flattering preface, in which

he declared the poem to be a simple tribute to the greatness of the people and the country without any reference whatever to the Union. Presently he found it expedient to make Edinburgh his head-quarters, though he continued sending the *Review* three times a week to his London printer. When the Treaty of Union had been elaborated by the Commissioners and had passed the English Parliament, its difficulties were not at an end. It had still to pass the Scotch Parliament, and a strong faction there, riding on the storm of popular excitement, insisted on discussing it clause by clause. Moved partly by curiosity, partly by earnest desire for the public good, according to his own account in the *Review* and in his *History of the Union*, Defoe resolved to undertake the "long, tedious, and hazardous journey" to Edinburgh, and use all his influence to push the Treaty through. It was a task of no small danger, for the prejudice against the Union went so high in the Scottish capital that he ran the risk of being torn to pieces by the populace. In one riot of which he gives an account, his lodging was beset, and for a time he was in as much peril "as a grenadier on a counter-scarp." Still he went on writing pamphlets, and lobbying members of Parliament. Owing to his intimate knowledge of all matters relating to trade, he also "had the honour to be frequently sent for into the several Committees of Parliament which were appointed to state some difficult points relating to equalities, taxes, prohibitions, &c." Even when the Union was agreed to by the Parliaments of both kingdoms, and took effect formally in May, 1707, difficulties arose in putting the details in operation, and Defoe prolonged his stay in Scotland through the whole of that year.

In this visit to Scotland Defoe protested to the world at the time that he had gone as a diplomatist on his own account, purely in the interests of peace. But a suspicion arose and was very freely expressed, that both in this journey and in previous journeys to the West and the North of England during the elections, he was serving as the agent, if not as a spy, of the Government. These reproaches he denied with indignation, declaring it particularly hard that he should be subjected to such spiteful and injurious treatment even by writers "embarked in the same cause, and pretending to write for the same public good." "I condemn," he said in his *History*, "as not worth mentioning, the suggestions of some people, of my being employed thither to carry on the interest of a party. I have never loved any parties, but with my utmost zeal have sincerely espoused the great and original interest of this nation, and of all nations—I mean truth and liberty,—and whoever are of that party, I desire to be with them." He took up the same charges more passionately in the Preface to the third volume of the *Review*, and dealt with them in some brilliant passages of apologetic eloquence.

"I must confess," he said, "I have sometimes thought it very hard, that having voluntarily, without the least direction, assistance, or encouragement, in spite of

all that has been suggested, taken upon me the most necessary work of removing national prejudices against the two most capital blessings of the world, Peace and Union, I should have the disaster to have the nations receive the doctrine and damn the teacher.

"Should I descend to particulars, it would hardly appear credible that in a Christian, a Protestant, and a Reformed nation, any man should receive such treatment as I have done, even from those very people whose consciences and judgments have stooped to the venerable truth, owned it has been useful, serviceable, and seasonable.

"I am charged with partiality, bribery, pensions, and payments—a thing the circumstances, family, and fortunes of a man devoted to his country's peace clears me of. If paid, gentlemen, for writing, if hired, if employed, why still harassed with merciless and malicious men, why pursued to all extremities by law for old accounts, which you clear other men of every day? Why oppressed, distressed, and driven from his family and from all his prospects of delivering them or himself? Is this the fate of men employed and hired? Is this the figure the agents of Courts and Princes make? Certainly had I been hired or employed, those people who own the service would by this time have set their servant free from the little and implacable malice of litigious persecutions, murdering warrants, and men whose mouths are to be stopt by trifles. Let this suffice to clear me of all the little and scandalous charges of being hired and employed.'

But then, people ask, if he was not officially employed, what had he to do with these affairs? Why should he meddle with them? To this he answers:—

"Truly, gentlemen, this is just the case. I saw a parcel of people caballing together to ruin property, corrupt the laws, invade the Government, debauch the people, and in short, enslave and embroil the nation, and I cried 'Fire!' or rather I cried 'Water!' for the fire was begun already. I see all the nation running into confusions and directly flying in the face of one another, and cried out 'Peace!' I called upon all sorts of people that had any senses to collect them together and judge for themselves what they were going to do, and excited them to lay hold of the madmen and take from them the wicked weapon, the knife with which they were going to destroy their mother, rip up the bowels of their country, and at last effectually ruin themselves.

"And what had I to do with this? Why, yes, gentlemen, I had the same right as every man that has a footing in his country, or that has a posterity to possess liberty and claim right, must have, to preserve the laws, liberty, and government of that country to which he belongs, and he that charges me with meddling in what does not concern me, meddles himself with what 'tis plain he does not understand."

"I am not the first," Defoe said in another place, "that has been stoned for saying the truth. I cannot but think that as time and the conviction of their senses will restore men to love the peace now established in this nation, so they will gradually see I have acted no part but that of a lover of my country, and an honest man."

Time has undeniably shown that in these efforts to promote party peace and national union Defoe acted like a lover of his country, and that his aims were the aims of a statesmanlike as well as an honest man. And yet his protestations of independence and spontaneity of action, with all their ring of truth and all their solemnity of asseveration, were merely diplomatic blinds. He was all the time, as he afterwards admitted, when the admission could do no harm except to his



own passing veracity, acting as the agent of Harley, and in enjoyment of an "appointment" from the Queen. What exactly the nature of his secret services in Scotland and elsewhere was, he very properly refused to reveal. His business probably was to ascertain and report the opinions of influential persons, and keep the Government informed as far as he could of the general state of feeling. At any rate it was not, as he alleged, mere curiosity, or the fear of his creditors, or private enterprise, or pure and simple patriotic zeal, that took Defoe to Scotland. The use he made of his debts as diplomatic instruments is curious. He not merely practised his faculties in the management of his creditors, which one of Lord Beaconsfield's characters commends as an incomparable means to a sound knowledge of human nature; but he made his debts actual pieces in his political game. His poverty, apparent, if not real, served as a screen for his employment under Government. When he was despatched on secret missions, he could depart wiping his eyes at the hardship of having to flee from his creditors.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### DR. SACHEVERELL, AND THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT.

SOME of Defoe's biographers have claimed for him that he anticipated the doctrines of Free Trade. This is an error. It is true that Defoe was never tired of insisting, in pamphlets, books, and number after number of the *Review*, on the all-importance of trade to the nation. Trade was the foundation of England's greatness; success in trade was the most honourable patent of nobility; next to the maintenance of the Protestant religion, the encouragement of trade should be the chief care of English statesmen. On these heads Defoe's enthusiasm was boundless, and his eloquence inexhaustible. It is true also that he supported with all his might the commercial clauses of the Treaty of Utrecht, which sought to abolish the prohibitory duties on our trade with France. It is this last circumstance which has earned for him the repute of being a pioneer of Free Trade. But his title to that repute does not bear examination. He was not so far in advance of his age as to detect the fallacy of the mercantile system. On the contrary, he avowed his adherence to it against those of his contemporaries who were inclined to call it in question. How Defoe came to support the new commercial treaty with France, and the grounds on which he supported it, can only be understood by looking at his relations with the Government.

While Defoe was living in Scotland in 1707, and filling the *Review* so exclusively with Scotch affairs that his readers, according to his own account, began to say that the fellow could talk of nothing but



the Union, and had grown mighty dull of late, Harley's position in the Ministry was gradually becoming very insecure. He was suspected of cooling in his zeal for the war, and of keeping up clandestine relations with the Tories; and when Marlborough returned from his campaign at the close of the year he insisted upon the Secretary's dismissal. The Queen, who secretly resented the Marlborough yoke, at first refused her consent. Presently an incident occurred which gave them an excuse for more urgent pressure. One Gregg, a clerk in Harley's office, was discovered to be in secret correspondence with the French Court, furnishing Louis with the contents of important State papers. Harley was charged with complicity. The charge was groundless, but he could not acquit himself of gross negligence in the custody of his papers. Godolphin and Marlborough threatened to resign unless he was dismissed. Then the Queen yielded.

When Harley fell, Defoe, according to his own account, in the *Appeal to Honour and Justice*, looked upon himself as lost, taking it for granted that "when a great officer fell, all who came in by his interest fall with him." But when his benefactor heard of this, and of Defoe's "resolution never to abandon the fortunes of the man to whom he owed so much," he kindly urged the devoted follower to think rather of his own interest than of any romantic obligation. "My lord Treasurer," he said, "will employ you in nothing but what is for the public service, and agreeably to your own sentiments of things; and besides it is the Queen you are serving, who has been very good to you. Pray apply yourselves as you used to do; I shall not take it ill from you in the least." To Godolphin accordingly Defoe applied himself, was by him introduced a second time to Her Majesty and to the honour of kissing her hand, and obtained "the continuance of an appointment which Her Majesty had been pleased to make him in consideration of a former special service he had done." This was the appointment which he held while he was challenging his enemies to say whether his outward circumstances looked like the figure the agents of Courts and Princes make.

The services on which Defoe was employed were, as before, of two kinds, active and literary. Shortly after the change in the Ministry early in 1708, news came of the gathering of the French expedition at Dunkirk, with a view, it was suspected, of trying to effect a landing in Scotland. Defoe was at once despatched to Edinburgh on an errand which, he says, was "far from being unfit for a sovereign to direct or an honest man to perform." If his duties were to mix with the people and ascertain the state of public feeling, and more specifically to sound suspected characters, to act, in short, as a political detective or spy, the service was one which it was essential that the Government should get some trustworthy person to undertake, and which any man at such a crisis might perform, if he could, without any discredit to his honesty or his patriotism. The independence of

the sea-girt realm was never in greater peril. The French expedition was a well conceived diversion, and it was imperative that the Government should know on what amount of support the invaders might rely in the bitterness prevailing in Scotland after the Union. Fortunately the loyalty of the Scotch Jacobites was not put to the test. As in the case of the Spanish Armada, accident fought on our side. The French fleet succeeded in reaching the coast of Scotland before the ships of the defenders; but it overshot its arranged landing-point, and had no hope but to sail back ingloriously to Dunkirk. Meantime, Defoe had satisfactorily discharged himself of his mission. Godolphin showed his appreciation of his services by recalling him as soon as Parliament was dissolved, to travel through the counties and serve the cause of the Government in the general elections. He was frequently sent to Scotland again on similarly secret errands, and seems to have established a printing business there, made arrangements for the simultaneous issue of the *Review* in Edinburgh and London, besides organizing Edinburgh newspapers, executing commissions for English merchants, and setting on foot a linen manufactory.

But we are more concerned with the literary labours of this versatile and indefatigable genius. These, in the midst of his multifarious commercial and diplomatic concerns, he never intermitted. All the time the *Review* continued to give a brilliant support to the Ministry. The French expedition had lent a new interest to the affairs of Scotland, and Defoe advertised that, though he never intended to make the *Review* a newspaper, circumstances enabled him to furnish exceptionally correct intelligence from Scotland as well as sound and impartial opinions. The intelligence which he communicated was all with a purpose, and a good purpose—the promotion of a better understanding between the united nations. He never had a better opportunity for preaching from his favourite text of Peace and Union, and he used it characteristically, championing the cause of the Scotch Presbyterians, asserting the firmness of their loyalty, smoothing over trading grievances by showing elaborately how both sides benefited from the arrangements of the Union, launching shafts in every direction at his favourite butts, and never missing a chance of exulting in his own superior wisdom. In what a posture would England have been now, he cried, if those wiseacres had been listened to, who were for trusting the defence of England solely to the militia and the fleet! Would our fleet have kept the French from landing if Providence had not interposed? and if they had landed, would a militia, undermined by disaffection, have been able to beat them back? The French king deserved a vote of thanks for opening the eyes of the nation against foolish advisers, and for helping it to heal internal divisions. Louis, poor gentleman, was much to be pitied, for his informers had evidently served him badly, and had led him to expect a greater amount

of support from disloyal factions than they had the will or the courage to expect.

During the electoral canvass, Defoe surpassed himself in the lively vigour of his advocacy of the Whig cause. "And now, gentlemen of England," he began in the *Review*—as it went on he became more and more direct and familiar in his manner of addressing his readers—"now we are a-going to choose Parliament men, I will tell you a story." And he proceeded to tell how in a certain borough a great patron procured the election of a "shock dog" as its parliamentary representative. Money and ale, Defoe says, could do anything. "God knows I speak it with regret for you all and for your posterity, it is not an impossible thing to debauch this nation into a choice of thieves, knaves, devils, shock dogs, or anything comparatively speaking, by the power of various intoxications." He spent several numbers of the *Review* in an ironical advice to the electors to choose Tories, showing with all his skill "the mighty and prevailing reason why we should have a Tory Parliament." "O gentlemen," he cried, "if we have any mind to buy some more experience, be sure and choose Tories." "We want a little instruction, we want to go to school to knaves and fools." Afterwards, dropping this thin mask, he declared that among the electors only "the drunken, the debauched, the swearing, the persecuting" would vote for the High-fliers. "The grave, the sober, the thinking, the prudent," would vote for the Whigs. "A House of Tories is a House of Devils." "If ever we have a Tory Parliament, the nation is undone." In his *Appeal to Honour and Justice* Defoe explained, that while he was serving Godolphin, "being resolved to remove all possible ground of suspicion that he kept any secret correspondence, he never visited, or wrote to, or any way corresponded with his principal benefactor for above three years." Seeing that Harley was at that time the leader of the party which Defoe was denouncing with such spirit, it would have been strange indeed if there had been much intercourse between them.

Though regarded after his fall from office as the natural leader of the Tory party, Harley was a very reserved politician, who kept his own counsel, used instruments of many shapes and sizes, steered clear of entangling engagements, and left himself free to take advantage of various opportunities. To wage war against the Ministry was the work of more ardent partisans. He stood by and waited while Bolingbroke and Rochester and their allies in the press cried out that the Government was now in the hands of the enemies of the Church, accused the Whigs of protracting the war to fill their own pockets with the plunder of the Supplies, and called upon the nation to put an end to their jobbery and mismanagement. The victory of Oudenarde in the summer of 1708 gave them a new handle. "What is the good," they cried, "of these glorious victories, if they do not bring



peace? What do we gain by beating the French in campaign after campaign, if we never bring them nearer to submission? It is incredible that the French King is not willing to make peace, if the Whigs did not profit too much by the war to give peace any encouragement." To these arguments for peace, Defoe opposed himself steadily in the *Review*. "Well, gentlemen," he began, when the news came of the battle of Oudenarde, "have the French noosed themselves again? Let us pray the Duke of Marlborough that a speedy peace may not follow, for what would become of us?" He was as willing for a peace on honourable terms as any man, but a peace till the Protestant Succession was secured and the balance of power firmly settled, "would be fatal to peace at home." "If that fatal thing called Peace abroad should happen, we shall certainly be undone." Presently, however, the French King began to make promising overtures for peace; the Ministry, in hopes of satisfactory terms, encouraged them; the talk through the nation was all of peace, and the Whigs contented themselves with passing an address to the Crown through Parliament urging the Queen to make no peace till the Pretender should be disowned by the French Court, and the Succession guaranteed by a compact with the Allies. Throughout the winter the *Review* expounded with brilliant clearness the only conditions on which an honourable peace could be founded, and prepared the nation to doubt the sincerity with which Louis had entered into negotiations. Much dissatisfaction was felt, and that dissatisfaction was eagerly fanned by the Tories when the negotiations fell through, in consequence of the distrust with which the allies regarded Louis, and their imposing upon him too hard a test of his honesty. Defoe fought vigorously against the popular discontent. The charges against Marlborough were idle rhodomontade. We had no reason to be discouraged with the progress of the war unless we had formed extravagant expectations. Though the French King's resources had been enfeebled, and he might reasonably have been expected to desire peace, he did not care for the welfare of France so much as for his own glory; he would fight to gain his purpose while there was a pistol in his treasury, and we must not expect Paris to be taken in a week. Nothing could be more admirable than Godolphin's management of our own Treasury; he deserved almost more credit than the Duke himself. "Your Treasurer has been your general of generals; without his exquisite management of the cash the Duke of Marlborough must have been beaten."

The Sacheverell incident, which ultimately led to the overthrow of the Ministry, gave Defoe a delightful opening for writing in their defence. A collection of his articles on this subject would show his controversial style at its best and brightest. Sacheverell and he were old antagonists. Sacheverell's "bloody flag and banner of defiance," and other High-flying truculencies, had furnished him with the main



basis of his *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. The laugh of the populace was then on Defoe's side, partly, perhaps, because the Government had prosecuted him. But in the changes of the troubled times, the Oxford Doctor, nurtured in "the scolding of the ancients," had found a more favourable opportunity. His literary skill was of the most mechanical kind; but at the close of 1709, when hopes of peace had been raised only to be disappointed, and the country was suffering from the distress of a prolonged war, people were more in a mood to listen to a preacher who disdained to check the sweep of his rhetoric by qualifications or abatements, and luxuriated in denouncing the Queen's Ministers from the pulpit under scriptural allegories. He delivered a tremendous philippic about the Perils of False Brethren, as a sermon before the Lord Mayor, in November. It would have been a wise thing for the Ministry to have left Sacheverell to be dealt with by their supporters in the press and in the pulpit. But in an evil hour Godolphin, stung by a nickname thrown at him by the rhetorical priest—a singularly comfortable-looking man to have so virulent a tongue, one of those orators who thrive on ill-conditioned language—resolved, contrary to the advice of more judicious colleagues, to have him impeached by the House of Commons. The Commons readily voted the sermon seditious, scandalous, and malicious, and agreed to a resolution for his impeachment; the Lords ordered that the case should be heard at their bar; and Westminster Hall was prepared to be the scene of a great public trial. At first Defoe, in heaping contemptuous ridicule upon the High-flying Doctor, had spoken as if he would consider prosecution a blunder. The man ought rather to be encouraged to go on exposing himself and his party. "Let him go on," he said, "to bully Moderation, explode Toleration, and damn the Union; the gain will be ours."

"You should use him as we do a hot horse. When he first frets and pulls, keep a stiff rein and hold him in if you can; but if he grows mad and furious, slack your hand, clap your heels to him, and let him go. Give him his belly full of it. Away goes the beast like a fury over hedge and ditch, till he runs himself off his mettle; perhaps bogs himself, and then he grows quiet of course. . . Besides, good people, do you not know the nature of the barking creatures? If you pass but by, and take no notice, they will yelp and make a noise, and perhaps run a little after you; but turn back, offer to strike them or throw stones at them, and you'll never have done—nay, you'll raise all the dogs of the parish upon you."

This last was precisely what the Government did, and they found reason to regret that they did not take Defoe's advice and let Sacheverell alone. When, however, they did resolve to prosecute him, Defoe immediately turned round, and exulted in the prosecution, as the very thing which he had foreseen. "Was not the *Review* right when he said you ought to let such people run on till they were out of breath? Did I not note to you that precipitations have always ruined them and served us? . . . Not a hound in the pack opened like

him. He has done the work effectually. . . . He has raised the house and waked the landlady . . . . Thank him, good people, thank him and clap him on the back ; let all his party do but this, and the day is our own." Nor did Defoe omit to remind the good people that he had been put in the pillory for satirically hinting that the High Church favoured such doctrines as Sacheverell was now prosecuted for. In his *Hymn to the Pillory* he had declared that Sacheverell ought to stand there in his place. His wish was now gratified ; "the bar of the House of Commons is the worst pillory in the nation." In the two months which elapsed before the trial, during which the excitement was steadily growing, Sacheverell and his doctrines were the main topic of the *Review*. If a popular tempest could have been allayed by brilliant argument, Defoe's papers ought to have done it. He was a manly antagonist, and did not imitate coarser pamphleteers in raking up scandals about the Doctor's private life—at least not under his own name. There was, indeed, a pamphlet issued by "a Gentleman of Oxford," which bears many marks of Defoe's authorship, and contains an account of some passages in Sacheverell's life not at all to the clergyman's credit. But the only pamphlet outside the *Review* which the biographers have ascribed to Defoe's activity, is a humorous letter from the Pope to Don Sacheverellio, giving him instructions how to advance the interests of the Pretender. In the *Review* Defoe, treating Sacheverell with riotously mirthful contempt, calls for the punishment of the doctrines rather than the man. During the trial, which lasted more than a fortnight, a mob attended the Doctor's carriage every day from his lodgings in the Temple to Westminster Hall, huzzaing, and pressing to kiss his hand, and spent the evenings in rabbling the Dissenters' meeting-houses, and hooting before the residences of prominent Whigs. Defoe had always said that the High-fliers would use violence to their opponents if they had the power, and here was a confirmation of his opinion on which he did not fail to insist. The sentence on Sacheverell, that his sermon and vindication should be burnt by the common hangman and himself suspended from preaching for three years, was hailed by the mob as an acquittal, and celebrated by tumultuous gatherings and bonfires. Defoe reasoned hard and joyfully to prove that the penalty was everything that could be wished, and exactly what he had all along advised and contemplated, but he did not succeed in persuading the masses that the Government had not suffered a defeat.

The impeachment of Sacheverell turned popular feeling violently against the Whigs. The break up of the Gertruydenberg Conference without peace gave a strong push in the same direction. It was all due, the Tories shouted, and the people were now willing to believe, to the folly of our Government in insisting upon impossible conditions from the French King, and their shameless want of patriotism in consulting the interests of the Allies rather than of England. The

Queen, who for some time had been longing to get rid of her Whig Ministers, did not at once set sail with this breeze. She dismissed the Earl of Sunderland in June, and sent word to her allies that she meant to make no further changes. Their ambassadors, with what was even then resented as an impertinence, congratulated her on this resolution, and then in August she took the momentous step of dismissing Godolphin, and putting the Treasury nominally in commission, but really under the management of Harley. For a few weeks it seems to have been Harley's wish to conduct the administration in concert with the remaining Whig members, but the extreme Tories, with whom he had been acting, overbore his moderate intentions. They threatened to desert him unless he broke clearly and definitely with the Whigs. In October accordingly the Whigs were all turned out of the Administration, Tories put in their places, Parliament dissolved, and writs issued for new elections. "So sudden and entire a change of the Ministry," Bishop Burnet remarks, "is scarce to be found in our history, especially where men of great abilities had served both with zeal and success." That the Queen should dismiss one or all of her Ministers in the face of a Parliamentary majority excited no surprise; but that the whole Administration should be changed at a stroke from one party to the other was a new and strange thing. The old Earl of Sunderland's suggestion to William III. had not taken root in constitutional practice; this was the fulfilment of it under the gradual pressure of circumstances.

Defoe's conduct while the political balance was rocking, and after the Whig side had decisively kicked the beam, is a curious study. One hardly knows which to admire most, the loyalty with which he stuck to the falling house till the moment of its collapse, or the adroitness with which he escaped from the ruins. Censure of his shiftiness is partly disarmed by the fact that there were so many in that troubled and uncertain time who would have acted like him if they had had the skill. Besides, he acted so steadily and with such sleepless vigilance and energy on the principle that the appearance of honesty is the best policy, that at this distance of time it is not easy to catch him tripping, and if we refuse to be guided by the opinion of his contemporaries, we almost inevitably fall victims to his incomparable plausibility. Deviations in his political writings from the course of the honest patriot are almost as difficult to detect as flaws in the verisimilitude of *Robinson Crusoe* or the *Journal of the Plague*.

During the two months' interval between the substitution of Dartmouth for Sunderland and the fall of Godolphin, Defoe used all his powers of eloquence and argument to avert the threatened changes in the Ministry, and keep the Tories out. He had a personal motive for this, he confessed. "My own share in the ravages they shall make upon our liberties is like to be as severe as any man's, from the rage and fury of a party who are in themselves implacable, and whom God



has not been pleased to bless me with a talent to flatter and submit to." Of the dismissed minister Sunderland, with whom Defoe had been in personal relations during the negotiations for the Union, he spoke in terms of the warmest praise, always with a formal profession of not challenging the Queen's judgment in discharging her servant. "My Lord Sunderland," he said, "leaves the Ministry with the most unblemished character that ever I read of any statesman in the world."

"I am making no court to my Lord Sunderland. The unpolished author of this paper never had the talent of making his court to the great men of the age." But where is the objection against his conduct? Not a dog of the party can bark against him. "They cannot show me a man of their party that ever did act like him, or of whom they can say we should believe he would if he had the opportunity." The Tories were clamouring for the dismissal of all the other Whigs. High-Church addresses to the Queen were pouring in, claiming to represent the sense of the nation, and hinting an absolute want of confidence in the Administration. Defoe examined the conduct of the ministers severally and collectively, and demanded where was the charge against them, where the complaint, where the treasure misapplied?

As for the sense of the nation, there was one sure way of testing this better than any got-up addresses, namely, the rise or fall of the public credit. The public stocks fell immediately on the news of Sunderland's dismissal, and were only partially revived upon Her Majesty's assurance to the Directors of the Bank that she meant to keep the Ministry otherwise unchanged. A rumour that Parliament was to be dissolved had sent them down again. If the public credit is thus affected by the mere apprehension of a turn of affairs in England, Defoe said, the thing itself will be a fatal blow to it. The coy Lady Credit had been wavering in her attachment to England; any sudden change would fright her away altogether. As for the pooh-pooh cry of the Tories that the national credit was of no consequence, that a nation could not be in debt to itself, and that their moneyed men would come forward with nineteen shillings in the pound for the support of the war, Defoe treated this claptrap with proper ridicule.

But in spite of all Defoe's efforts, the crash came. On the 10th of August the Queen sent to Godolphin for the Treasurer's staff, and Harley became her Prime Minister. How did Defoe behave then? The first two numbers of the *Review* after the Lord Treasurer's fall are among the most masterly of his writings. He was not a small, mean, timid time-server and turncoat. He faced about with bold and steady caution, on the alert to give the lie to anybody who dared to accuse him of facing about at all. He frankly admitted that he was in a quandary what to say about the change that had taken place. "If a man could be found that could sail north and south, and could speak truth and falsehood, that could turn to the right hand and the left, all at the same time, he would be the man, he would be the only



proper person that should now speak." Of one thing only he was certain. "We are sure honest men go out." As for their successors, "it is our business to hope, and time must answer for those that come in. If Tories, if Jacobites, if High-fliers, if madmen of any kind are to come in, I am against them; I ask them no favour, I make no court with them, nor am I going about to please them." But the question was, what was to be done in the circumstances? Defoe stated plainly two courses, with their respective dangers. To cry out about the new Ministry was to ruin public credit. To profess cheerfulness was to encourage the change and strengthen the hands of those that desired to push it farther. On the whole, for himself he considered the first danger the most to be dreaded of the two. Therefore he announced his intention of devoting his whole energy to maintaining the public credit, and advised all true Whigs to do likewise. "Though I don't like the crew, I won't sink the ship. I'll do my best to save the ship. I'll pump and heave and haul, and do anything I can, though he that pulls with me were my enemy. The reason is plain. We are all in the ship, and must sink or swim together."

What could be more plausible? What conduct more truly patriotic? Indeed, it would be difficult to find fault with Defoe's behaviour, were it not for the rogue's protestations of inability to court the favour of great men, and his own subsequent confessions in his *Appeal to Honour and Justice*, as to what took place behind the scenes. Immediately on the turn of affairs he took steps to secure that connexion with the Government, the existence of which he was always denying. The day after Godolphin's displacement, he tells us, he waited on him, and "humbly asked his lordship's direction what course he should take." Godolphin at once assured him, in very much the same words that Harley had used before, that the change need make no difference to him; he was the Queen's servant, and all that had been done for him was by Her Majesty's special and particular direction; his business was to wait till he saw things settled, and then apply himself to the Ministers of State to receive Her Majesty's commands from them. Thereupon Defoe resolved to guide himself by the following principle:—

"It occurred to me immediately, as a principle for my conduct, that it was not material to me what ministers Her Majesty was pleased to employ: my duty was to go along with every Ministry, so far as they did not break in upon the Constitution and the laws and liberties of my country; my part being only the duty of a subject, viz., to submit to all lawful commands, and to enter into no service which was not justifiable by the laws; to all which I have exactly obliged myself."

Defoe was thus, as he says, providentially cast back upon his original benefactor. That he received any consideration, pension, gratification, or reward for his services to Harley, "except that old appointment which Her Majesty was pleased to make him," he strenuously denied. The denial is possibly true, and it is extremely probable that

he was within the truth when he protested in the most solemn manner that he had never "received any instructions, directions, orders, or let them call it what they will, of that kind, for the writing of any part of what he had written, or any materials for the putting together, for the forming any book or pamphlet whatsoever, from the said Earl of Oxford, late Lord Treasurer, or from any person by his order or direction, since the time that the late Earl of Godolphin was Lord Treasurer." Defoe declared that "in all his writing, he ever capitulated for his liberty to speak according to his own judgment of things," and we may easily believe him. He was much too clever a servant to need instructions.

His secret services to Harley in the new elections are probably buried in oblivion. In the *Review* he pursued a strain which to the reader who does not take his articles in connexion with the politics of the time, might appear to be thoroughly consistent with his advice to the electors on previous occasions. He meant to confine himself, he said at starting, rather to the manner of choosing than the persons to be chosen, and he never denounced bribery, intimidation, rioting, rabbling, and every form of interference with the electors' freedom of choice in more energetic language. As regarded the persons to be chosen, his advice was as before, to choose moderate men—men of sense and temper, not men of fire and fury. But he no longer asserted, as he had done before, the exclusive possession of good qualities by the Whigs. He now recognized that there were hot Whigs as well as moderate Whigs, moderate Tories as well as hot Tories. It was for the nation to avoid both extremes and rally round the men of moderation, whether Whig or Tory. "If we have a Tory High-flying Parliament, we Tories are undone. If we have a hot Whig Parliament, we Whigs are undone."

The terms of Defoe's advice were unexceptionable, but the Whigs perceived a change from the time when he declared that if ever we have a Tory Parliament the nation is undone. It was as if a Republican writer, after the *coup d'état* of the 16th May, 1877, had warned the French against electing extreme Republicans, and had echoed the Marshal-President's advice to give their votes to moderate men of all parties. Defoe did not increase the conviction of his party loyalty when a Tory Parliament was returned, by trying to prove that whatever the new members might call themselves, they must inevitably be Whigs. He admitted in the most unqualified way that the elections had been disgracefully riotous and disorderly, and lectured the constituencies freely on their conduct. "It is not," he said, "a Free Parliament that you have chosen. You have met, mobbed, rabbled, and thrown dirt at one another, but election by mob is no more free election than Oliver's election by a standing army. Parliaments and rabbles are contrary things." Yet he had hopes of the gentlemen who had been thus chosen.

"I have it upon many good grounds, as I think I told you, that there are some people who are shortly to come together, of whose character, let the people that send them up think what they will, when they come thither they will not run the mad length that is expected of them; they will act upon the Revolution principle, keep within the circle of the law, proceed with temper, moderation, and justice, to support the same interest we have all carried on—and this I call being Whiggish or acting as Whigs.

"I shall not trouble you with further examining why they will be so, or why they will act thus; I think it is so plain from the necessity of the Constitution and the circumstances before them, that it needs no further demonstration—they will be Whigs, they must be Whigs; there is no remedy, for the Constitution is a Whig."

The new members of Parliament must either be Whigs or traitors, for everybody who favours the Protestant succession is a Whig, and everybody who does not is a traitor. Defoe used the same ingenuity in playing upon words in his arguments in support of the public credit. Every true Whig, he argued, in the *Review* and in separate essays, was bound to uphold the public credit, for to permit it to be impaired was the surest way to let in the Pretender. The Whigs were accused of withdrawing their money from the public stocks, to mark their distrust of the Government. "Nonsense!" Defoe said, "in that case they would not be Whigs." Naturally enough, as the *Review* now practically supported a Ministry in which extreme Tories had the predominance, he was upbraided for having gone over to that party. "Why, gentlemen," he retorted, "it would be more natural for you to think I am turned Turk than High-flier; and to make me a Mahometan would not be half so ridiculous as to make me say the Whigs are running down credit, when, on the contrary, I am still satisfied if there were no Whigs at this time, there would hardly be any such thing as credit left among us." "If the credit of the nation is to be maintained, we must all act as Whigs, because credit can be maintained upon no other foot. Had the doctrine of non-resistance of tyranny been voted, had the Prerogative been exalted above the Law, and property subjected to absolute will, would Parliament have voted the funds? Credit supposes Whigs lending and a Whig Government borrowing. It is nonsense to talk of credit and passive submission."

Had Defoe confined himself to lecturing those hot Whigs who were so afraid of the secret Jacobitism of Harley's colleagues that they were tempted to withdraw their money from the public stocks, posterity, unable to judge how far these fears were justified, and how far it was due to a happy accident that they were not realized, might have given him credit for sacrificing partisanship to patriotism. This plea could hardly be used for another matter in which, with every show of reasonable fairness, he gave a virtual support to the Ministry. We have seen how he spoke of Marlborough, and Godolphin's management of the army and the finances when the Whigs were in office. When the Tories came in, they at once set about redeeming their pledges to inquire into the malversation of their predecessors.



Concerning this proceeding, Defoe spoke with an approval which, though necessarily guarded in view of his former professions of extreme satisfaction, was none the less calculated to recommend.

"Inquiry into miscarriages in things so famous and so fatal as war and battle is a thing so popular that no man can argue against it; and had we paid well, and hanged well, much sooner, as some men had not been less in a condition to mistake, so some others might not have been here to find fault. But it is better late than never; when the inquiry is set about heartily, it may be useful on several accounts, both to unravel past errors and to prevent new. For my part as we have for many years past groaned for want of justice upon wilful mistakes, yet, in hopes some of the careful and mischievous designing gentlemen may come in for a share, I am glad the work is begun."

With equal good humour and skill in leaving open a double interpretation, he commented on the fact that the new Parliament did not, as had been customary, give a formal vote of thanks to Marlborough for his conduct of his last campaign.

"We have had a mighty pother here in print about rewarding of generals. Some think great men too much rewarded and some think them too little rewarded. The case is so nice, neither side will bear me to speak my mind; but I am persuaded of this, that there is no general has or ever will merit great things of us, but he has received and will receive all the grateful acknowledgments he ought to expect."

But his readers would complain that he had not defined the word "ought." That, he said, with audacious pleasantry, he left to them. And while they were on the subject of mismanagement, he would give them a word of advice which he had often given them before. "While you bite and devour one another, you are all mismanagers. Put an end to your factions, your tumults, your rabbles, or you will not be able to make war upon anybody." Previously, however, his way of making peace at home was to denounce the High-fliers. He was still pursuing the same object, though by a different course, now that the leaders of the High-fliers were in office, when he declared that "those Whigs who say that the new Ministry is entirely composed of Tories and High-fliers are fool-Whigs." The remark was no doubt perfectly true, but yet if Defoe had been thoroughly consistent he ought at least, instead of supporting the Ministry on account of the small moderate element it contained, to have urged its purification from dangerous ingredients.

This, however, it must be admitted, he also did, though indirectly and at a somewhat later stage, when Harley's tenure of the Premiership was menaced by High-fliers who thought him much too lukewarm a leader. A "cave," the famous October Club, was formed in the autumn of 1711, to urge more extreme measures upon the ministry against Whig officials, and to organize a High-Church agitation throughout the country. It consisted chiefly of country squires, who wished to see members of the late Ministry impeached, and the Duke of Marlborough dismissed from the command of the army. At Har-



ley's instigation Swift wrote an "advice" to these hot partisans, beseeching them to have patience and trust the Ministry, and everything that they wished would happen in due time. Defoe sought to break their ranks by a direct onslaught in his most vigorous style, denouncing them in the *Review* as Jacobites in disguise and an illicit importation from France, and writing their "secret history," "with some friendly characters of the illustrious members of that honourable society" in two separate tracts. This skirmish served the double purpose of strengthening Harley against the reckless zealots of his party, and keeping up Defoe's appearance of impartiality. Throughout the fierce struggle of parties, never so intense in any period of our history as during those years when the constitution itself hung in the balance, it was as a True-born Englishman first and a Whig and Dissenter afterwards, that Defoe gave his support to the Tory Ministry. It may not have been his fault; he may have been most unjustly suspected; but nobody at the time would believe his protestations of independence. When his former High-flying persecutor, the Earl of Nottingham, went over to the Whigs, and with their acquiescence, or at least without their active opposition, introduced another Bill to put down Occasional Conformity, Defoe wrote trenchantly against it. But even then the Dissenters, as he loudly lamented, repudiated his alliance. The Whigs were not so much pleased on this occasion with his denunciations of the persecuting spirit of the High-Churchmen, as they were enraged by his stinging taunts levelled at themselves for abandoning the Dissenters to their persecutors. The Dissenters must now see, Defoe said, that they would not be any better off under a Low-Church ministry than under a High-Church ministry. But the Dissenters, considering that the Whigs were too much in a minority to prevent the passing of the Bill, however willing to do so, would only see in their professed champion an artful supporter of the men in power.

A curious instance has been preserved of the estimate of Defoe's character at this time.\* M. Mesnager, an agent sent by the French King to sound the Ministry and the country as to terms of peace, wanted an able pamphleteer to promote the French interest. The Swedish Resident recommended Defoe, who had just issued a tract, entitled *Reasons why this Nation ought to put an end to this expensive War*. Mesnager was delighted with the tract, at once had it translated into French and circulated through the Netherlands, employed the Swede to treat with Defoe, and sent him a hundred pistoles by way of earnest. Defoe kept the pistoles, but told the Queen, M. Mesnager recording that though "he missed his aim in this person,

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\* I doubt whether it adds to the credibility of the story in all points that the minutes of M. Mesnager's Negotiations were "translated" and probably composed by Defoe himself. See page 86.

the money was perhaps not wholly lost; for I afterwards understood that the man was in the service of the state, and that he had let the Queen know of the hundred pistoles he had received; so I was obliged to sit still, and be very well satisfied that I had not discovered myself to him, for it was not our season yet." The anecdote at once shows the general opinion entertained of Defoe, and the fact that he was less corruptible than was supposed. There can be little doubt that our astute intriguer would have outwitted the French emissary if he had not been warned in time, pocketed his bribes, and wormed his secrets out of him for the information of the Government.

During Godolphin's Ministry, Defoe's cue had been to reason with the nation against too impatient a longing for peace. Let us have peace by all means, had been his text, but not till honourable terms have been secured, and meantime the war is going on as prosperously as any but madmen can desire. He repeatedly challenged adversaries, who compared what he wrote then with what he wrote under the new Ministry, to prove him guilty of inconsistency. He stood on safe ground when he made this challenge, for circumstances had changed sufficiently to justify any change of opinion. The plans of the Confederates were disarranged by the death of the Emperor, and the accession of his brother, the Archduke Charles, to the vacant crown. To give the crown of Spain in these new circumstances to the Archduke, as had been the object of the Allies when they began the war, would have been as dangerous to the balance of power as to let Spain pass to Louis's grandson, Philip of Anjou. It would be more dangerous, Defoe argued; and by far the safest course would be to give Spain to Philip and his posterity, who "would be as much Spaniards in a very short time, as ever Philip II. was or any of his other predecessors." This was the main argument which had been used in the latter days of King William against going to war at all, and Defoe had then refuted it scornfully; but circumstances had changed, and he not only adopted it, but also issued an essay "proving that it was always the sense both of King William and of all the Confederates, and even of the Grand Alliance itself, that the Spanish monarchy should never be united in the person of the Emperor." Partition the Spanish dominions in Europe between France and Germany, and the West Indies between England and Holland—such was Defoe's idea of a proper basis of peace.

But while Defoe expounded in various forms the conditions of a good peace, he devoted his main energy to proving that peace under some conditions was a necessity. He dilated on the enormous expense of the war, and showed by convincing examples that it was ruining the trade of the country. Much that he said was perfectly true, but if he had taken M. Mesnager's bribes and loyally carried out his instructions, he could not more effectually have served the French King's interests than by writing as he did at that juncture. The proclaimed

necessity under which England lay to make peace, offered Louis an advantage which he was not slow to take. The proposals which he made at the Congress of Utrecht, and which he had ascertained would be accepted by the English Ministry and the Queen, were not unjustly characterised by the indignant Whigs as being such as he might have made at the close of a successful war. The territorial concessions to England and Holland were insignificant; the States were to have the right of garrisoning certain barrier towns in Flanders, and England was to have some portions of Canada. But there was no mention of dividing the West Indies between them—the West Indies were to remain attached to Spain. It was the restoration of their trade that was their main desire in these great commercial countries, and even that object Louis agreed to promote in a manner that seemed, according to the ideas of the time, to be more to his own advantage than to theirs. In the case of England, he was to remove prohibitions against our imports, and in return we engaged to give the French imports the privileges of the most favoured nations. In short, we were to have free trade with France, which the commercial classes of the time looked upon as a very doubtful blessing.

It is because Defoe wrote in favour of this free trade that he is supposed to have been superior to the commercial fallacies of the time. But a glance at his arguments shows that this is a very hasty inference. It was no part of Defoe's art as a controversialist to seek to correct popular prejudices; on the contrary, it was his habit to take them for granted as the bases of his arguments, to work from them as premises towards his conclusion. He expressly avowed himself a prohibitionist in principle:—

“I am far from being of their mind who say that all prohibitions are destructive to trade, and that wise nations, the Dutch, make no prohibitions at all.

“Where any nation has, by the singular blessing of God, a produce given to their country from which such a manufacture can be made as other nations cannot be without, and none can make that produce but themselves, it would be distraction in that nation not to prohibit the exportation of that original produce till it is manufactured.”

He had been taunted with flying in the face of what he had himself said in King William's time in favour of prohibition. But he boldly undertakes to prove that prohibition was absolutely necessary in King William's time, and not only so, but that “the advantages we may make of taking off a prohibition now are all founded upon the advantages we did make as laying on a prohibition then: that the same reason which made a prohibition then the best thing, makes it now the maddest thing a nation could do or ever did in the matter of trade.” In King William's time, the balance of trade was against us to the extent of 850,000*l.*, in consequence of the French King's laying extravagant duties upon the import of all our woollen manufactures.



"Whoever thinks that by opening the French trade I should mean . . . that we should come to trade with them 850,000*l.* *per annum* to our loss, must think me as mad as I think him for suggesting it ; but if, on the contrary, I prove that as we traded then 850,000*l.* a year to our loss, we can trade now with them 600,000*l.* to our gain, then I will venture to draw this consequence, that we are distracted, speaking of our trading wits, if we do not trade with them."

In a preface to the Eighth Volume of the *Review* (July 29, 1712), Defoe announced his intention of discontinuing the publication, in consequence of the tax then imposed on newspapers. We can hardly suppose that this was his real motive, and as a matter of fact, the *Review*, whose death had been announced, reappeared in due course in the form of a single leaf, and was published in that form till the 11th of June, 1713. By that time a new project was on foot which Defoe had frequently declared his intention of starting, a paper devoted exclusively to the discussion of the affairs of trade. The *Review* at one time had declared its main subject to be trade, but had claimed a liberty of digression under which the main subject had all but disappeared. At last, however, in May, 1713, when popular excitement and hot Parliamentary debates were expected on the Commercial Treaty with France, an exclusively trading paper was established, entitled *Mercator*. Defoe denied being the author—that is, conductor or editor of this paper—and said that he had not power to put what he would into it ; which may have been literally true. Every number, however, bears traces of his hand or guidance ; *Mercator* is identical in opinions, style, and spirit with the *Review*, differing only in the greater openness of its attacks upon the opposition of the Whigs to the Treaty of Commerce. Party spirit was so violent that summer, after the publication of the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, that Defoe was probably glad to shelter himself under the responsibility of another name ; he had flaunted the cloak of impartial advice till it had become a thing of shreds and patches.

To prove that the balance of trade, in spite of a prevailing impression to the contrary, not only might be, but had been, on the side of England, was the chief purpose of *Mercator*. The Whig *Flying Post* chaffed *Mercator* for trying to reconcile impossibilities, but *Mercator* held stoutly on with an elaborate apparatus of comparative tables of exports and imports, and ingenious schemes for the development of various branches of the trade with France. Defoe was too fond of carrying the war into the enemy's country, to attack prohibitions or the received doctrine as to the balance of trade in principle ; he fought the enemy spiritedly on their own ground. "Take a medium of three years for above forty years past, and calculate the exports and imports to and from France, and it shall appear the balance of trade was always on the English side, to the loss and disadvantage of the French." It followed, upon the received commercial doctrines, that the French King was making a great concession in consenting to take off high



duties upon English goods. This was precisely what Defoe was labouring to prove. "The French King in taking off the said high duties ruins all his own manufactures." The common belief was that the terms of peace would ruin English manufacturing industry; full in the teeth of this, Defoe, as was his daring custom, flung the paradox of the extreme opposite. On this occasion he acted purely as a party writer. That he was never a free-trader, at least in principle, will appear from the following extract from his *Plan of the English Commerce*, published in 1728:—

"Seeing trade then is the fund of wealth and power, we cannot wonder that we see the wisest Princes and States anxious and concerned for the increase of the commerce and trade of their subjects, and of the growth of the country; anxious to propagate the sale of such goods as are the manufacture of their own subjects, and that employs their own people; especially of such as keep the money of their dominions at home; and on the contrary, prohibiting the importation from abroad of such things as are the product of other countries, and of the labour of other people, or which carry money back in return, and not merchandise in exchange.

"Nor can we wonder that we see such Princes and States endeavouring to set up such manufactures in their own countries, which they see successfully and profitably carried on by their neighbours, and to endeavour to procure the materials proper for setting up those manufactures by all just and possible methods from other countries.

"Hence we cannot blame the French or Germans for endeavouring to get over the British wool into their hands, by the help of which they may bring their people to imitate our manufactures, which are so esteemed in the world, as well as so gainful at home.

"Nor can we blame any foreign nation for prohibiting the use and wearing of our manufactures, if they can either make them at home, or make any which they can shift with in their stead.

"The reason is plain. 'Tis the interest of every nation to encourage their own trade, to encourage those manufactures that will employ their own subjects, consume their own growth of provisions, as well as materials of commerce, and such as will keep their money or species at home.

"'Tis from this just principle that the French prohibit the English woollen manufacture, and the English again prohibit, or impose a tax equal to a prohibition, on the French silks, paper, linen, and several other of their manufactures. 'Tis from the same just reason in trade that we prohibit the wearing of East India wrought silks, printed calicoes, &c.; that we prohibit the importation of French brandy, Brazil sugars, and Spanish Tobacco; and so of several other things."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### DIFFICULTIES IN RE-CHANGING SIDES.

DEFOE's unwearied zeal in the service of Harley had excited the bitterest resentment among his old allies, the Whigs. He often complained of it, more in sorrow than in anger. He had no right to look for any other treatment; it was a just punishment upon him for seeking the good of his country without respect of parties. An author that wrote from principle had a very hard task in those dangerous

times. If he ventured on the dangerous precipice of telling unbiassed truth, he must expect martyrdom from both sides. This resignation of the simple single-minded patriot to the pains and penalties of honesty, naturally added to the rage of the party with whose factious proceedings he would have nothing to do ; and yet it has always been thought an extraordinary instance of party spite that the Whigs should have instituted a prosecution against him, on the alleged ground that a certain remarkable series of Tracts were written in favour of the Pretender. Towards the end of 1712 Defoe had issued *A Seasonable Warning and Caution against the Insinuations of Papists and Jacobites in favour of the Pretender*. No charge of Jacobitism could be made against a pamphlet containing such a sentence as this :—

“Think, then, dear Britons ! what a King this Pretender must be ! a papist by inclination ; a tyrant by education ; a Frenchman by honour and obligation ;—and how long will your liberties last you in this condition ? And when your liberties are gone, how long will your religion remain ? When your hands are tied ; when armies bind you ; when power oppresses you ; when a tyrant disarms you ; when a Popish French tyrant reigns over you ; by what means or methods can you pretend to maintain your Protestant religion ?”

A second pamphlet, *Hannibal at the Gates*, strongly urging party union and the banishment of factious spirit, was equally unmistakable in tone. The titles of the following three of the series were more startling :—*Reasons against the Succession of the House of Hanover—And what if the Pretender should come ? or Some considerations of the advantages and real consequences of the Pretender's possessing the Crown of Great Britain—An Answer to a Question that nobody thinks of, viz., But what if the Queen should die ?* The contents, however, were plainly ironical. The main reason against the Succession of the Prince of Hanover was that it might be wise for the nation to take a short turn of a French, Popish, hereditary-right régime in the first place as an emetic. Emetics were good for the health of individuals, and there could be no better preparative for a healthy constitutional government than another experience of arbitrary power. Defoe had used the same ironical argument for putting Tories in office in 1708. The advantages of the Pretender's possessing the Crown were that we should be saved from all further danger of a war with France, and should no longer hold the exposed position of a Protestant State among the great Catholic Powers of Europe. The point of the last pamphlet of the series was less distinct ; it suggested the possibility of the English people losing their properties, their estates, inheritance, lands, goods, lives, and liberties, unless they were clear in their own minds what course to take in the event of the Queen's death. But none of the three Tracts contain anything that could possibly be interpreted as a serious argument in favour of the Pretender. They were all calculated to support the Succession of the Elector of

Hanover. Why, then, should the Whigs have prosecuted the author? It was a strange thing, as Defoe did not fail to complain, that they should try to punish a man for writing in their own interest.

The truth, however, is that although Defoe afterwards tried to convince the Whig leaders that he had written these pamphlets in their interest, they were written in the interest of Harley. They were calculated to recommend that Minister to Prince George, in the event of his accession to the English throne. We see this at once when we examine their contents by the light of the personal intrigues of the time. Harley was playing a double game. It was doubtful who the Queen's successor would be, and he aimed at making himself safe in either of the two possible contingencies. Very soon after his accession to power in 1710, he made vague overtures for the restoration of the Stuarts under guarantees for civil and religious liberty. When pressed to take definite steps in pursuance of this plan, he deprecated haste, and put off and put off, till the Pretender's adherents lost patience. All the time he was making protestations of fidelity to the Court of Hanover. The increasing vagueness of his promises to the Jacobites seems to show that, as time went on, he became convinced that the Hanoverian was the winning cause. No man could better advise him as to the feeling of the English people than Defoe, who was constantly perambulating the country on secret services, in all probability for the direct purpose of sounding the general opinion. It was towards the end of 1712, by which time Harley's shilly-shallying had effectually disgusted the Jacobites, that the first of Defoe's series of Anti-Jacobite tracts appeared. It professed to be written by an Englishman at the Court of Hanover, which affords some ground, though it must be confessed slight, for supposing that Defoe had visited Hanover, presumably as the bearer of some of Harley's assurances of loyalty. The *Seasonable Warning and Caution* was circulated, Defoe himself tells us, in thousands among the poor people by several of his friends. Here was a fact to which Harley could appeal as a circumstantial proof of his zeal in the Hanoverian cause. Whether Defoe's Anti-Jacobite tracts really served his benefactor in this way, can only be matter of conjecture. However that may be, they were upon the surface written in Harley's interest. The warning and caution was expressly directed against the insinuations that Ministry were in favour of the Pretender. All who made these insinuations were assumed by the writer to be Papists, Jacobites, and enemies of Britain. As these insinuations were the chief war-cry of the Whigs, and we now know that they were not without foundation, it is easy to understand why Defoe's pamphlets, though Anti-Jacobite, were resented by the party in whose interest he had formerly written. He excused himself afterwards by saying that he was not aware of the Jacobite leanings of the Ministry; that none of them ever said one word in favour of the Pretender to him; that he saw no reason to believe that they did



favour the Pretender. As for himself, he said, they certainly never employed him in any Jacobite intrigue. He defied his enemies to "prove that he ever kept company or had any society, friendship, or conversation with any Jacobite. So averse had he been to the interest and the people, that he had studiously avoided their company on all occasions." Within a few months of his making these protestations, Defoe was editing a Jacobite newspaper under secret instructions from a Whig Government. But this is anticipating.

That an influential Whig should have set on foot a prosecution of Defoe as the author of "treasonable libels against the House of Hanover," although the charge had no foundation in the language of the incriminated pamphlets, is intelligible enough. The Whig party writers were delighted with the prosecution, one of them triumphing over Defoe as being caught at last, and put "in Lob's pound," and speaking of him as "the vilest of all the writers that have prostituted their pens either to encourage faction, oblige a party, or serve their own mercenary ends." But that the Court of Queen's Bench, before whom Defoe was brought—with some difficulty, it would appear, for he had fortified his house at Newington like Robinson Crusoe's castle—should have unanimously declared his pamphlets to be treasonable, and that one of them, on his pleading that they were ironical, should have told him that it was a kind of irony for which he might come to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, is not so easy to understand, unless we suppose that, in these tempestuous times, judges like other men were powerfully swayed by party feeling. It is possible, however, that they deemed the mere titles of the pamphlets offences in themselves, disturbing cries raised while the people were not yet clear of the forest of anarchy, and still subject to dangerous panics—offences of the same nature as if a man should shout fire in sport in a crowded theatre. Possibly, also, the severity of the Court was increased by Defoe's indiscretion in commenting upon the case in the *Review*, while it was still *sub judice*. At any rate he escaped punishment. The Attorney-General was ordered to prosecute him, but before the trial came off Defoe obtained a pardon under the royal seal.

The Whigs were thus balked of revenge upon their renegade. Their loyal writers attributed Defoe's pardon to the secret Jacobitism of the Ministry—quite wrongly—as we have just seen he was acting for Harley as a Hanoverian, and not as a Jacobite. Curiously enough, when Defoe next came before the Queen's Bench, the instigator of the prosecution was a Tory, and the Government was Whig, and he again escaped from the clutches of the law by the favour of the Government. Till Mr. William Lee's remarkable discovery, fourteen years ago, of certain letters in Defoe's handwriting in the State Paper Office, it was generally believed that on the death of Queen Anne, the fall of the Tory Administration, and the complete discomfiture of Harley's trimming policy, the veteran pamphleteer and journalist,



now fifty-three years of age, withdrew from political warfare, and spent the evening of his life in the composition of those works of fiction which have made his name immortal. His biographers have misjudged his character and underrated his energy. When Harley fell from power Defoe sought service under the Whigs. He had some difficulty in regaining their favour, and when he did obtain employment from them it was of a kind little to his honour.

In his *Appeal to Honour and Justice*, published early in 1715, in which he defended himself against the charges copiously and virulently urged of being a party-writer, a hireling, and a turncoat, and explained everything that was doubtful in his conduct by alleging the obligations of gratitude to his first benefactor, Harley, Defoe declared that since the Queen's death he had taken refuge in absolute silence. He found, he said, that if he offered to say a word in favour of the Hanoverian settlement it was called fawning and turning round again, and therefore he resolved to meddle neither one way nor the other. He complained sorrowfully that in spite of this resolution, and though he had not written one book since the Queen's death, a great many things were called by his name. In that case he had no resource but to practise a Christian spirit and pray for the forgiveness of his enemies. This was Defoe's own account, and it was accepted as the whole truth, till Mr. Lee's careful research and good fortune gave a different colour to his personal history from the time of Harley's displacement.\*

During the dissensions, in the last days of the Queen, which broke up the Tory Ministry, *Mercator* was dropped. Defoe seems immediately to have entered into communication with the printer of the Whig *Flying Post*, one William Hurt. The owner of the *Post* was abroad at the time, but his managers, whether actuated by personal spite or reasonable suspicion, learning that Hurt was in communication with one whom they looked upon as their enemy, decided at once to change their printer. There being no copyright in newspaper titles in those days, Hurt retaliated by engaging Defoe to write another paper under the same title, advertising that, from the arrangements he had made, readers would find the new *Flying Post* better than the old. It was in his labours on this sham *Flying Post*, as the original indignantly called it in an appeal to Hurt's sense of honour and justice against the piracy, that Defoe came into collision with the law. His new organ was warmly loyal. On the 14th of August it contained a highly-coloured panegyric of George I., which alone would refute Defoe's assertion that he knew nothing of the arts of the courtier.

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\* In making mention of Mr. Lee's valuable researches and discoveries, I ought to add that his manner of connecting the facts for which I am indebted to him, and the construction he puts upon them is entirely different from mine. For the view here implied of Defoe's character and motives, Mr. Lee is in no way responsible.

His Majesty was described as a combination of more graces, virtues, and capacities than the world had ever seen united in one individual—a man “born for council, and fitted to command the world.” Another number of the *Flying Post*, a few days afterwards, contained an attack on one of the few Tories among the Lords of the Regency, nominated for the management of affairs till the King’s arrival. During Bolingbroke’s brief term of ascendancy he had despatched the Earl of Anglesey on a mission to Ireland. The Earl had hardly landed at Dublin when news followed him of the Queen’s death, and he returned to act as one of the Lords Regent. In the *Flying Post* Defoe asserted that the object of his journey to Ireland was “to new model the Forces there, and particularly to break no less than seventy of the honest officers of the army, and to fill up their places with the tools and creatures of Con. Phipps, and such a rabble of cut-throats as were fit for the work that they had for them to do.” That there was some truth in the allegation is likely enough; Sir Constantine Phipps was, at least, shortly afterwards dismissed from his offices. But Lord Anglesey at once took action against it as a scandalous libel. Defoe was brought before the Lords Justices, and committed for trial.

He was liberated, however, on bail, and in spite of what he says about his resolution not to meddle on either side, made an energetic use of his liberty. He wrote *The Secret History of One Year*—the year after William’s accession—vindicating the King’s clemency towards the abettors of the arbitrary government of James, and explaining that he was compelled to employ many of them by the rapacious scrambling of his own adherents for places and pensions. The indirect bearing of this tract is obvious. In October three pamphlets came from Defoe’s fertile pen; an *Advice to the People of England* to lay aside feuds and faction, and live together under the new King like good Christians; and two parts, in quick succession, of a *Secret History of the White Staff*. This last work was an account of the circumstances under which the Treasurer’s White Staff was taken from the Earl of Oxford, and put his conduct in a favourable light, exonerating him from the suspicion of Jacobitism, and affirming—not quite accurately, as other accounts of the transaction seem to imply—that it was by Harley’s advice that the Staff was committed to the Earl of Shrewsbury. One would be glad to accept this as proof of Defoe’s attachment to the cause of his disgraced benefactor; yet Harley, as he lay in the Tower awaiting his trial on an impeachment of high treason, issued a disclaimer concerning the *Secret History* and another pamphlet, entitled *An Account of the Conduct of Robert, Earl of Oxford*. These pamphlets, he said, were not written with his knowledge, or by his direction or encouragement; “on the contrary, he had reason to believe from several passages therein contained that it was the intention of the author, or authors, to do him a prejudice.” This disclaimer may have been dictated by a wish not to appear wanting in

respect to his judges ; at any rate, Defoe's *Secret History* bears no trace on the surface of a design to prejudice him by its recital of facts. *An Appeal to Honour and Justice* was Defoe's next production. While writing it, he was seized with a violent apoplectic fit, and it was issued with a Conclusion by the Publisher, mentioning this circumstance, explaining that the pamphlet was consequently incomplete, and adding : " If he recovers, he may be able to finish what he began ; if not, it is the opinion of most that know him that the treatment which he here complains of, and some others that he would have spoken of, have been the apparent cause of his disaster." There is no sign of incompleteness in the *Appeal* ; and the Conclusion by the Publisher, while the author lay " in a weak and languishing condition, neither able to go on nor likely to recover, at least in any short time," gives a most artistic finishing stroke to it. Defoe never interfered with the perfection of it after his recovery, which took place very shortly. The *Appeal* was issued in the first week of January ; before the end of the month the indomitable writer was ready with a Third Part of the *Secret History*, and a reply to Atterbury's *Advice to the Freeholders of England* in view of the approaching elections. A series of tracts written in the character of a Quaker quickly followed, one rebuking a Dissenting preacher for inciting the new Government to vindictive severities, another rebuking Sacheverell for hypocrisy and perjury in taking the oath of abjuration, a third rebuking the Duke of Ormond for encouraging Jacobite and High-Church mobs. In March, Defoe published his *Family Instructor*, a book of 450 pages ; in July, his *History, by a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service, of the Wars of Charles XII.*

Formidable as the list of these works seems, it does not represent more than Defoe's average rate of production for thirty years of his life. With grave anxieties added to the strain of such incessant toil, it is no wonder that nature should have raised its protest in an apoplectic fit. Even nature must have owned herself vanquished, when she saw this very protest pressed into the service of the irresistible and triumphant worker. All the time he was at large upon bail, awaiting his trial. The trial took place in July, 1715, and he was found guilty. But sentence was deferred till next term. October came round, but Defoe did not appear to receive his sentence. He had made his peace with the Government, upon " capitulations " of which chance has preserved the record in his own handwriting. He represented privately to Lord Chief Justice Parker that he had always been devoted to the Whig interest, and that any seeming departure from it had been due to errors of judgment, not to want of attachment. Whether the Whig leaders believed this representation we do not know, but they agreed to pardon " all former mistakes " if he would now enter faithfully into their service. Though the Hanoverian succession had been cordially welcomed by the steady masses of the nation,



the Mar Rebellion in Scotland and the sympathy shown with this movement in the south warned them that their enemies were not to be despised. There was a large turbulent element in the population, upon which agitators might work with fatal effect. The Jacobites had still a hold upon the Press, and the past years had been fruitful of examples of the danger of trying to crush sedition with the arm of the law. Prosecution had been proved to be the surest road to popularity. It occurred therefore that Defoe might be useful if he still passed as an opponent of the Government, insinuating himself as such into the confidence of Jacobites, obtained control of their publications, and nipped mischief in the bud. It was a dangerous and delicate service, exposing the emissary to dire revenge if he were detected, and to suspicion and misconstruction from his employers in his efforts to escape detection. But Defoe, delighting in his superior wits, and happy in the midst of dangerous intrigues, boldly undertook the task.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### LATER JOURNALISTIC LABOURS.

FOR the discovery of this "strange and surprising" chapter in Defoe's life, which clears up much that might otherwise have been disputable in his character, the world is indebted solely to Mr. William Lee. Accident put Mr. Lee on the right scent, from which previous biographers had been diverted by too literal and implicit a faith in the arch-deceiver's statements, and too comprehensive an application of his complaint that his name was made the hackney title of the times, upon which all sorts of low scribblers fathered their vile productions. Defoe's secret services on Tory papers exposed him, as we have seen, to misconstruction. Nobody knew this better than himself, and nobody could have guarded against it with more sleepless care. In the fourth year of King George's reign a change took place in the Ministry. Lord Townshend was succeeded in the Home Secretary's office by Lord Stanhope. Thereupon Defoe judged it expedient to write to a private secretary, Mr. de la Faye, explaining at length his position. This letter along with five others, also designed to prevent misconstruction by his employers, lay in the State Paper Office till the year 1864, when the whole packet fell into the hands of Mr. Lee. The following succinct fragment of autobiography is dated April 26, 1718:

"Though I doubt not but you have acquainted my Lord Stanhope with what humble sense of his Lordship's goodness I received the account you were pleased to give me, that my little services are accepted, and that his lordship is satisfied to go



upon the foot of former capitulations, etc. ; yet I confess, Sir, I have been anxious upon many accounts, with respect as well to the service itself as my own safety, lest my lord may think himself ill-served by me, even when I have best performed my duty.

"I thought it therefore not only a debt to myself, but a duty to his lordship, that I should give his lordship a short account as clear as I can, how far my former instructions empowered me to act, and in a word what this little piece of service is, for which I am so much a subject of his lordship's present favour and bounty.

"It was in the Ministry of my Lord Townshend, when my Lord Chief Justice Parker, to whom I stand obliged for the favour, was pleased so far to state my case, that notwithstanding the misrepresentations under which I had suffered, and notwithstanding some mistakes which I was the first to acknowledge, I was so happy as to be believed in the professions I made of a sincere attachment to the interests of the present Government, and, speaking with all possible humility, I hope I have not dishonoured my Lord Parker's recommendation.

"In considering, after this, which way I might be rendered most useful to the Government, it was proposed by my Lord Townshend that I should still appear as if I were, as before, under the displeasure of the Government, and separated from the Whigs ; and that I might be more serviceable in a kind of disguise than if I appeared openly ; and upon this foot a weekly paper, which I was at first directed to write, in opposition to a scandalous paper called the *Shift Shifted*, was laid aside, and the first thing I engaged in was a monthly book called *Mercurius Politicus*, of which presently. In the interval of this, Dyer, the *News-Letter* writer, having been dead, and Dormer, his successor, being unable by his troubles to carry on that work, I had an offer of a share in the property, as well as in the management of that work.

"I immediately acquainted my Lord Townshend of it, who, by Mr. Buckley, let me know it would be a very acceptable piece of service ; for that letter was really very prejudicial to the public, and the most difficult to come at in a judicial way in case of offence given. My lord was pleased to add, by Mr. Buckley, that he would consider my service in that case, as he afterwards did.

"Upon this I engaged in it ; and that so far, that though the property was not wholly my own, yet the conduct and government of the style and news was so entirely in me, that I ventured to assure his lordship the sting of that mischievous paper should be entirely taken out, though it was granted that the style should continue Tory as it was, that the party might be amused and not set up another, which would have destroyed the design, and this part I therefore take entirely on myself still.

"This went on for a year, before my Lord Townshend went out of the office ; and his lordship, in consideration of this service, made me the appointment which Mr. Buckley knows of, with a promise of a further allowance as service presented.

"My Lord Sunderland, to whose goodness I had many years ago been obliged, when I was in a secret commission sent to Scotland, was pleased to approve and continue this service, and the appointment annexed ; and with his lordship's approbation, I introduced myself, in the disguise of a translator of the foreign news, to be so far concerned in this weekly paper of *Mist's* as to be able to keep it within the circle of a secret management, also prevent the mischievous part of it ; and yet neither *Mist*, or any of those concerned with him, have the least guess or suspicion by whose direction I do it.

"But here it becomes necessary to acquaint my lord (as I hinted to you, Sir), that this paper, called the *Journal*, is not in myself in property, as the other, only in management ; with this express difference, that if anything happens to be put in without my knowledge, which may give offence, or if anything slips my observation which may be ill-taken, his lordship shall be sure always to know whether he has a servant to reprove or a stranger to correct.

"Upon the whole, however, this is the consequence, that by this management, the weekly *Journal*, and *Dormer's Letter*, as also the *Mercurius Politicus*, which is in the same nature of management as the *Journal*, will be always kept (mistakes excepted) to pass as Tory papers, and yet be disabled and enervated, so as to do no mischief or give any offence to the Government."

Others of the tell-tale letters show us in detail how Defoe acquitted himself of his engagements to the Government—bowing, as he said, in the House of Rimmon. In one he speaks of a traitorous pamphlet which he has stopped at the press, and begs the Secretary to assure his superiors that he has the original in safe keeping, and that no eye but his own has seen it. In another he apologizes for an obnoxious paragraph which had crept into *Mist's Journal*, avowing that "Mr. Mist did it, after I had looked over what we had gotten together," that he [Defoe] had no concern in it, directly or indirectly, and that he thought himself obliged to notice this, to make good what he said in his last, viz., that if any mistake happened, Lord Stanhope should always know whether he had a servant to reprove or a stranger to punish. In another he expresses his alarm at hearing of a private suit against Morpheu, the printer of the *Mercurius Politicus*, for a passage in that paper, and explains, first, that the obnoxious passage appeared two years before, and was consequently covered by a capitulation giving him indemnity for all former mistakes; secondly, that the thing itself was not his, neither could any one pretend to charge it on him, and consequently it could not be adduced as proof of any failure in his duty. In another letter he gives an account of a new treaty with Mist. "I need not trouble you," he says, "with the particulars, but in a word he professes himself convinced that he has been wrong, that the Government has treated him with lenity and forbearance, and he solemnly engages to me to give no more offence. The liberties Mr. Buckley mentioned, viz., to seem on the same side as before, to rally the *Flying Post*, the Whig writers, and even the word 'Whig,' &c., and to admit foolish and trifling things in favour of the Tories. This, as I represented it to him, he agrees is liberty enough, and resolves his paper shall, for the future, amuse the Tories, but not affront the Government." If Mist should break through this understanding, Defoe hopes it will be understood that it is not his fault; he can only say that the printer's resolutions of amendment seem to be sincere.

"In pursuance also of this reformation, he brought me this morning the enclosed letter, which, indeed, I was glad to see, because, though it seems couched in terms which might have been made public, yet has a secret gall in it, and a manifest tendency to reproach the Government with partiality and injustice, and (as it acknowledges expressly) was written to serve a present turn. As this is an earnest of his just intention, I hope he will go on to your satisfaction.

"Give me leave, Sir, to mention here a circumstance which concerns myself, and which, indeed, is a little hardship upon me, viz., that I seem to merit less, when I intercept a piece of barefaced treason at the Press, than when I stop such a letter as the enclosed; because one seems to be of a kind which no man would dare to meddle with. But I would persuade myself, Sir, that stopping such notorious things is not without its good effect, particularly because, as it is true that some people are generally found who do venture to print anything that offends, so stopping them here is some discouragement and disappointment to them, and they often die in our hands.

"I speak this, Sir, as well on occasion of what you were pleased to say upon that

letter which I sent you formerly about *Killing no Murder*, as upon another with verses in it, which Mr. Mist gave me yesterday ; which, upon my word, is so villainous and scandalous that I scarce dare to send it without your order, and an assurance that my doing so shall be taken well, for I confess it has a peculiar insolence in it against His Majesty's person which (as blasphemous words against God) are scarce fit to be repeated."

In the last of the series (of date June 13, 1718), Defoe is able to assure his employers that "he believes the time is come when the journal, instead of affronting and offending the Government, may many ways be made serviceable to the Government ; and he has Mr. M. so absolutely resigned to proper measures for it, that he is persuaded he may answer for it."

Following up the clue afforded by these letters, Mr. Lee has traced the history of *Mist's Journal* under Defoe's surveillance. Mist did not prove so absolutely resigned to proper measures as his supervisor had begun to hope. On the contrary, he had frequent fits of refractory obstinacy, and gave a good deal of trouble both to Defoe and to the Government. Between them, however, they had the poor man completely in their power. When he yielded to the importunity of his Jacobite correspondents, or kicked against the taunts of the Whig organs about his wings being clipped—they, no more than he, knew how—his secret controllers had two ways of bringing him to reason. Sometimes the Government prosecuted him, wisely choosing occasions for their displeasure on which they were likely to have popular feeling on their side. At other times Defoe threatened to withdraw and have nothing more to do with the *Journal*. Once or twice he carried this threat into execution. His absence soon told on the circulation, and Mist entreated him to return, making promises of good behaviour for the future. Further, Defoe commended himself to the gratitude of his unconscious dupe by sympathizing with him in his troubles, undertaking the conduct of the paper while he lay in prison, and editing two volumes of a selection of *Miscellany Letters* from its columns. At last, however, after eight years of this partnership, during which Mist had no suspicion of Defoe's connexion with the Government, the secret somehow seems to have leaked out. Such at least is Mr. Lee's highly probable explanation of a murderous attack made by Mist upon his partner.

Defoe, of course, stoutly denied Mist's accusations, and published a touching account of the circumstances, describing his assailant as a lamentable instance of ingratitude. Here was a man whom he had saved from the gallows, and befriended at his own risk in the utmost distress, turning round upon him, "basely using, insulting, and provoking him, and at last drawing his sword upon his benefactor." Defoe disarmed him, gave him his life, and sent for a surgeon to dress his wounds. But even this was not enough. Mist would give him nothing but abuse of the worst and grossest nature. It almost shook Defoe's faith in human nature. Was there ever such ingratitude



known before? The most curious thing is that Mr. Lee, who has brought all these facts to light, seems to share Defoe's ingenuous astonishment at this "strange instance of ungrateful violence," and conjectures that it must have proceeded from imaginary wrong of a very grievous nature, such as a suspicion that Defoe had instigated the Government to prosecute him. It is perhaps as well that it should have fallen to so loyal an admirer to exhume Defoe's secret services and public protestations; the record might otherwise have been rejected as incredible.

Mr. Lee's researches were not confined to Defoe's relations with Mist and his journal, and the other publications mentioned in the precious letter to Mr. de la Faye. Once assured that Defoe did not withdraw from newspaper-writing in 1715, he ransacked the journals of the period for traces of his hand and contemporary allusions to his labours. A rich harvest rewarded Mr. Lee's zeal. Defoe's individuality is so marked that it thrusts itself through every disguise. A careful student of the *Review*, who had compared it with the literature of the time, and learnt his peculiar tricks of style and vivid ranges of interest, could not easily be at fault in identifying a composition of any length. Defoe's incomparable clearness of statement would alone betray him; that was a gift of nature which no art could successfully imitate. Contemporaries also were quick at recognising their Proteus in his many shapes, and their gossip gives a strong support to internal evidence, resting as it probably did on evidences which were not altogether internal. Though Mr. Lee may have been rash sometimes in quoting little scraps of news as Defoe's, he must be admitted to have established that, prodigious as was the number and extent of the veteran's separate publications during the reign of the First George, it was also the most active period of his career as a journalist. Managing Mist and writing for his journal would have been work enough for an ordinary man; but Defoe founded, conducted, and wrote for a host of other newspapers—the monthly *Mercurius Politicus*, an octavo of sixty-four pages (1716–1720); the weekly *Dormer's News-Letter* (written, not printed, 1716–1718); the *Whitehall Evening Post* (a tri-weekly quarto-sheet, established 1718); the *Daily Post* (a daily single leaf, folio, established 1719); and *Applebee's Journal* (with which his connexion began in 1720 and ended in 1726).

The contributions to these newspapers, which Mr. Lee has assigned, with great judgment it seems to me, to Defoe, range over a wide field of topics, from piracy to highway robberies, to suicide and the Divinity of Christ. Defoe's own test of a good writer was that he should at once please and serve his readers, and he kept this double object in view in his newspaper writings, as much as in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and the *Family Instructor*. Great as is the variety of subjects in the selections which Mr. Lee has made upon



internal evidence, they are all of them subjects in which Defoe showed a keen interest in his acknowledged works. In providing amusement for his readers, he did not soar above his age in point of refinement; and in providing instruction, he did not fall below his age in point of morality and religion. It is a notable circumstance that one of the marks by which contemporaries traced his hand was "the little art he is truly master of, of forging a story and imposing it on the world for truth." Of this he gave a conspicuous instance in *Mist's Journal* in an account of the marvellous blowing up of the island of St. Vincent, which in circumstantial invention and force of description must be ranked among his master-pieces. But Defoe did more than embellish stories of strange events for his newspapers. He was a master of journalistic art in all its branches, and a fertile inventor and organizer of new devices. It is to him, Mr. Lee says, and his researches entitle him to authority, that we owe the prototype of the leading article, a Letter Introductory, as it became the fashion to call it, written on some subject of general interest and placed at the commencement of each number. The writer of this Letter Introductory was known as the "author" of the paper.

Another feature in journalism which Defoe greatly helped to develop, if he did not actually invent, was the Journal of Society. In the *Review* he had provided for the amusement of his readers by the device of a Scandal Club, whose transactions he professed to report. But political excitement was intense throughout the whole of Queen Anne's reign; Defoe could afford but small space for scandal, and his Club was often occupied with fighting his minor political battles. When, however, the Hanoverian succession was secured, and the land had rest from the hot strife of parties, light gossip was more in request. Newspapers became less political, and their circulation extended from the coffee-houses, inns, and ale-houses to a new class of readers. "They have of late," a writer in *Applebee's Journal* says in 1725, "been taken in much by the women, especially the political ladies, to assist at the tea-table." Defoe seems to have taken an active part in making *Mist's Journal* and *Applebee's Journal*, both Tory organs, suitable for this more frivolous section of the public. This fell in with his purpose of diminishing the political weight of these journals, and at the same time increased their sale. He converted them from rabid party agencies into registers of domestic news and vehicles of social disquisitions, sometimes grave, sometimes gay in subject, but uniformly bright and spirited in tone.

The raw materials of several of Defoe's elaborate tales, such as *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*, are to be found in the columns of *Mist's* and *Applebee's*. In connexion with *Applebee's* more particularly, Defoe went some way towards anticipating the work of the modern Special Correspondent. He apparently interviewed distinguished criminals in Newgate, and extracted from them the stories of their

lives. Part of what he thus gathered he communicated to *Applebee*; sometimes, when the notoriety of the case justified it, he drew up longer narratives and published them separately as pamphlets. He was an adept in the art of puffing his own productions, whether books or journals. It may be doubted whether any American editor ever mastered this art more thoroughly than Defoe. Nothing, for instance, could surpass the boldness of Defoe's plan for directing public attention to his narrative of the robberies and escapes of Jack Sheppard. He seems to have taken a particular interest in this daring gaol-breaker. Mr. Lee, in fact, finds evidence that he had gained Sheppard's affectionate esteem. He certainly turned his acquaintance to admirable account. He procured a letter for *Applebee's Journal* from Jack, with "kind love," and a copy of verses of his own composition. Both letter and verses probably came from a more practised pen, but, to avert suspicion, the original of the letter was declared to be on view at Applebee's, and "well known to be in the handwriting of Jack Sheppard." Next Defoe prepared a thrilling narrative of Jack's adventures, which was of course described as written by the prisoner himself, and printed at his particular desire. But this was not all. The artful author further arranged that when Sheppard reached his place of execution, he should send for a friend to the cart as he stood under the gibbet, and deliver a copy of the pamphlet as his last speech and dying confession. A paragraph recording this incident was duly inserted in the newspapers. It is a crowning illustration of the inventive daring with which Defoe practised the tricks of his trade.

One of Defoe's last works in connection with journalism was to write a prospectus for a new weekly periodical, the *Universal Spectator*, which was started by his son-in-law, Henry Baker, in October, 1728. There is more than internal and circumstantial evidence that this prospectus was Defoe's composition. When Baker retired from the paper five years afterwards, he drew up a list of the articles which had appeared under his editorship, with the names of the writers attached. This list has been preserved, and from it we learn that the first number, containing a prospectus and an introductory essay on the qualifications of a good writer, was written by Defoe. That experienced journalist naturally tried to give an air of novelty to the enterprise. "If this paper," the first sentence runs, "was not intended to be what no paper at present is, we should never attempt to crowd in among such a throng of public writers as at this time oppress the town." In effect the scheme of the *Universal Spectator* was to revive the higher kind of periodical essays which made the reputation of the earlier *Spectator*. Attempts to follow in the wake of Addison and Steele had for so long ceased to be features in journalism; their manner had been so effectually superseded by less refined purveyors of light literature—Defoe him-

self going heartily with the stream—that the revival was opportune, and in point of fact proved successful, the *Universal Spectator* continuing to exist for nearly twenty years. It shows how quickly the *Spectator* took its place among the classics, that the writer of the prospectus considered it necessary to deprecate a charge of presumption in seeming to challenge comparison.

“Let no man envy us the celebrated title we have assumed, or charge us with arrogance, as if we bid the world expect great things from us. Must we have no power to please, unless we come up to the full height of those inimitable performances? Is there no wit or humour left because they are gone? Is the spirit of the *Spectators* all lost, and their mantle fallen upon nobody? Have they said all that can be said? Has the world offered no variety, and presented no new scenes, since they retired from us? Or did they leave off, because they were quite exhausted and had no more to say?”

Defoe did not always speak so respectfully of the authors of the *Spectator*. If he had been asked why they left off, he would probably have given the reason contained in the last sentence, and backed his opinion by contemptuous remarks about the want of fertility in the scholarly brain. He himself could have gone on producing forever; he was never gruelled for lack of matter, had no nice ideas about manner, and was sometimes sore about the superior respectability of those who had. But here he was on business, addressing people who looked back regretfully from the vulgarity of *Mist's* and *Applebee's* to the refinement of earlier periodicals, and making a bid for their custom. A few more sentences from his advertisement will show how well he understood their prejudices:—

“The main design of this work is, to turn your thoughts a little off from the clamour of contending parties, which has so long surfeited you with their ill-timed politics, and restore your taste to things truly superior and sublime.

“In order to this, we shall endeavour to present you with such subjects as are capable, if well handled, both to divert and to instruct you; such as shall render conversation pleasant, and help to make mankind agreeable to one another.

“As for our management of them, not to promise too much for ourselves, we shall only say we hope, at least, to make our work acceptable to everybody, because we resolve, if possible, to displease nobody.

“We assure the world, by way of negative, that we shall engage in no quarrels, meddle with no parties, deal in no scandal, nor endeavour to make any men merry at the expense of their neighbours. In a word, we shall set nobody together by the ears. And though we have encouraged the ingenious world to correspond with us by letters, we hope they will not take it ill, that we say beforehand, no letters will be taken notice of by us which contain any personal reproaches, intermeddle with family breaches, or tend to scandal or indecency of any kind.

“The current papers are more than sufficient to carry on all the dirty work the town can have for them to do; and what with party strife, politics, poetic quarrels, and all the other consequences of a wrangling age, they are in no danger of wanting employment; and those readers who delight in such things, may divert themselves there. But our views, as is said above, lie another way.”

Good writing is what Defoe promises the readers of the *Universal Spectator*, and this leads him to consider what particular qualifica-



tions go to the composition, or, in a word, "what is required to denominate a man a *good writer*." His definition is worth quoting as a statement of his principles of composition.

"One says this is a polite author ; another says, that is an excellent *good writer* ; and generally we find some oblique strokes pointed sideways at themselves ; intimating that whether we think fit to allow it or not, they take themselves to be very *good writers*. And, indeed, I must excuse them their vanity : for if a poor author had not some good opinion of himself, especially when under the discouragement of having nobody else to be of his mind, he would never write at all ; nay, he could not ; it would take off all the little dull edge that his pen might have on it before, and he would not be able to say one word to the purpose.

"Now whatever may be the lot of this paper, be that as common fame shall direct, yet without entering into the enquiry who writes better or who writes worse, I shall lay down one specific, by which you that read shall impartially determine who are, or are not, to be called *good writers*. In a word, the character of a good writer, wherever he is to be found, is this, viz., that he writes so as to please and serve at the same time.

"If he writes to *please*, and not to *serve* he is a flatterer and a hypocrite ; if to *serve* and not to *please*, he turns cynic and satirist. The first deals in smooth falsehood, the last in rough scandal ; the last may do some good, though little ; the first does no good, and may do mischief, not a little ; the last provokes your rage, the first provokes your pride ; and in a word either of them is hurtful rather than useful. But the writer that strives to be useful, writes to *serve* you, and at the same time, by an imperceptible art, draws you on to be pleased also. He represents truth with plainness, virtue with praise : he even reprehends with a softness that carries the force of a satire without the salt of it ; and he insensibly screws himself into your good opinion, that as his writings merit your regard, so they fail not to obtain it.

"This is part of the character by which I define a good writer ; I say 'tis but part of it, for it is not a half sheet that would contain the full description ; a large volume would hardly suffice it. His fame requires, indeed, a very good writer to give it due praise, and for that reason (and a good reason too) I go no farther with it."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PLACE OF DEFOE'S FICTIONS IN HIS LIFE.

THOSE of my readers who have thought of Defoe only as a writer of stories which young and old still love to read, must not be surprised that so few pages of this little book should be left for an account of his work in that field. No doubt Defoe's chief claim to the world's interest is that he is the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. But there is little to be said about this or any other of Defoe's tales in themselves. Their art is simple, unique, incommunicable, and they are too well known to need description. On the other hand, there is much that is worth knowing and not generally known about the relation of these works to his life, and the place that they occupy in the sum total of his literary activity. Hundreds of thousands since Defoe's death, and



millions in ages to come, would never have heard his name but for *Robinson Crusoe*. To his contemporaries the publication of that work was but a small incident in a career which for twenty years had claimed and held their interest. People in these days are apt to imagine, because Defoe wrote the most fascinating of books for children, that he was himself simple, child-like, frank, open, and unsuspecting. He has been so described by more than one historian of literature. It was not so that he appeared to his contemporaries, and it is not so that he can appear to us when we know his life, unless we recognise that he took a child's delight in beating with their own weapons the most astute intriguers in the most intriguing period of English history.

Defoe was essentially a journalist. He wrote for the day, and for the greatest interest of the greatest number of the day. He always had some ship sailing with the passing breeze, and laden with a useful cargo for the coast upon which the wind chanced to be blowing. If the Tichborne trial had happened in his time, we should certainly have had from him an exact history of the boyhood and surprising adventures of Thomas Castro, commonly known as Sir Roger, which would have come down to us as a true record, taken, perhaps, by the chaplain of Portland prison from the convict's own lips. It would have had such an air of authenticity, and would have been corroborated by such an array of trustworthy witnesses, that nobody in later times could have doubted its truth. Defoe always wrote what a large number of people were in a mood to read. All his writings, with so few exceptions that they may reasonably be supposed to fall within the category, were *pièces de circonstance*. Whenever any distinguished person died or otherwise engaged public attention, no matter how distinguished, whether as a politician, a criminal, or a divine, Defoe lost no time in bringing out a biography. It was in such emergencies that he produced his memoirs of Charles XII., Peter the Great, Count Patkul, the Duke of Shrewsbury, Baron de Goertz, the Rev. Daniel Williams, Captain Avery the King of the Pirates, Dominique Cartouche, Rob Roy, Jonathan Wild, Jack Sheppard, Duncan Campbell. When the day had been fixed for the Earl of Oxford's trial for high treason Defoe issued the fictitious *Minutes of the Secret Negotiations of Mons. Mesnager* at the English Court during his ministry. We owe the *Journal of the Plague in 1665* to a visitation which fell upon France in 1721, and caused much apprehension in England. The germ which in his fertile mind grew into *Robinson Crusoe* fell from the real adventures of Alexander Selkirk, whose solitary residence of four years on the island of Juan Fernandez was a nine days' wonder in the reign of Queen Anne. Defoe was too busy with his politics at the moment to turn it to account; it was recalled to him later on, in the year 1719, when the exploits of famous pirates had given a vivid interest to the chances of adventurers in far-away islands on the Amer-

ican and African coasts. The *Life, Adventures, and Piracies of the famous Captain Singleton*, who was set on shore in Madagascar, traversed the continent of Africa from east to west past the sources of the Nile, and went roving again in the company of the famous Captain Avery, was produced to satisfy the same demand. Such biographies as those of *Moll Flanders* and the *Lady Roxana* were of a kind, as he himself illustrated by an amusing anecdote, that interested all times and all professions and degrees; but we have seen to what accident he owed their suggestion and probably part of their materials. He had tested the market for such wares in his *Journals of Society*.

In following Defoe's career, we are constantly reminded that he was a man of business, and practised the profession of letters with a shrewd eye to the main chance. He scoffed at the idea of practising it with any other object, though he had aspirations after immortal fame as much as any of his more decorous contemporaries. Like Thomas Fuller, he frankly avowed that he wrote "for some honest profit to himself." Did any man, he asked, do anything without some regard to his own advantage? Whenever he hit upon a profitable vein, he worked it to exhaustion, putting the ore into various shapes to attract different purchasers. *Robinson Crusoe* made a sensation; he immediately followed up the original story with a Second Part, and the Second Part with a volume of *Serious Reflections*. He had discovered the keenness of the public appetite for stories of the supernatural, in 1706, by means of his *True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal*.\* When, in 1720, he undertook to write the life of the popular fortune-teller, Duncan Campbell—a puff which illustrates almost better than anything else Defoe's extraordinary ingenuity in putting a respectable face upon the most disreputable materials—he had another proof of the avidity with which people run to hear marvels. He followed up this clue with *A System of Magic, or a History of the Black Art; The Secrets of the Invisible World disclosed, or a Universal History of Apparitions*; and a humorous *History of the Devil*, in which last work he subjected *Paradise Lost*, to which Addison had drawn attention by his papers in the *Spectator*, to very sharp criticism. In his books and pamphlets on the Behaviour of Servants, and his works of more formal instruction, the *Family Instructor*, the *Plan of English Commerce*, the *Complete English Trades-*

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\* Mr. Lee has disposed conclusively of the myth that this tale was written to promote the sale of a dull book by one Drelincourt on the *Fear of Death*, which Mrs. Veal's ghost earnestly recommended her friend to read. It was first published separately as a pamphlet without any reference to Drelincourt. It was not printed with Drelincourt's *Fear of Death* till the fourth edition of that work, which was already popular. Further, the sale of Drelincourt does not appear to have been increased by the addition of Defoe's pamphlet to the book, and of Mrs. Veal's recommendation to the pamphlet.

man, the *Complete English Gentleman* (his last work, left unfinished and unpublished), he wrote with a similar regard to what was for the moment in demand.

Defoe's novel writing thus grew naturally out of his general literary trade, and had not a little in common with the rest of his abundant stock. All his productions in this line, his masterpiece, *Robinson Crusoe*, as well as what Charles Lamb calls his "secondary novels," *Captain Singleton*, *Colonel Jack*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana*, were manufactured from material for which he had ascertained that there was a market; the only novelty lay in the mode of preparation. From writing biographies with real names attached to them, it was but a short step to writing biographies with fictitious names. Defoe is sometimes spoken of as the inventor of the realistic novel; realistic biography would, perhaps, be a more strictly accurate description. Looking at the character of his professed records of fact, it seems strange that he should ever have thought of writing the lives of imaginary heroes, and should not have remained content with "forging stories and imposing them on the world for truth" about famous and notorious persons in real life. The purveyors of news in those days could use without fear of detection a licence which would not be tolerated now. They could not, indeed, satisfy the public appetite for news without taking liberties with the truth. They had no special correspondents in all parts of the world, to fill their pages with reports from the spot of things seen and heard. The public had acquired the habit of looking to the press, to periodical papers, and casual books and pamphlets for information about passing events and prominent men before sufficient means had been organized for procuring information which should approximate to correctness. In such circumstances the temptation to invent and embellish was irresistible. "Why," a paragraph-maker of the time is made to say, "if we will write nothing but truth, we must bring you no news; we are bound to bring you such news as we can find." Yet it was not lies but truth that the public wanted as much as they do now. Hence arose the necessity of fortifying reports with circumstantial evidence of their authenticity. Nobody rebuked unprincipled news-writers more strongly than Defoe, and no news-writer was half as copious in his guarantees for the accuracy of his information. When a report reached England that the island of St. Vincent had been blown into the air, Defoe wrote a description of the calamity, the most astonishing thing that had happened in the world "since the Creation, or at least since the destruction of the earth by water in the general Deluge," and prefaced his description by saying:

"Our accounts of this come from so many several hands and several places that it would be impossible to bring the letters all separately into this journal; and when we had done so, or attempted to do so, would leave the story confused, and the world not perfectly informed. We have therefore thought it better to give the substance of this amazing accident in one collection; making together as full and



as distinct an account of the whole as we believe it possible to come at by any intelligence whatsoever, and at the close of this account we shall give some probable guesses at the natural cause of so terrible an operation."

Defoe carried the same system of vouching for the truth of his narratives by referring them to likely sources, into pamphlets and books, which really served the purpose of newspapers, being written for the gratification of passing interests. The History of the Wars of Charles XII., which Mr. Lee ascribes to him, was "written by a Scot's gentleman, in the Swedish service." The short narrative of the life and death of Count Patkul was "written by the Lutheran Minister, who assisted him in his last hours, and faithfully translated out of a High Dutch manuscript." M. Mesnager's minutes of his negotiations were "written by himself," and "done out of French." Defoe knew that the public would read such narratives more eagerly if they believed them to be true, and ascribed them to authors whose position entitled them to confidence. There can be little doubt that he drew upon his imagination for more than the title-pages. But why, when he had so many eminent and notorious persons to serve as his subjects, with all the advantages of bearing names about which the public were already curious, did he turn to the adventures of new and fictitious heroes and heroines? One can only suppose that he was attracted by the greater freedom of movement in pure invention; he made the venture with *Robinson Crusoe*; it was successful, and he repeated it. But after the success of *Robinson Crusoe* he by no means abandoned his old fields. It was after this that he produced autobiographies and other *primâ facie* authentic lives of notorious thieves and pirates. With all his records of heroes, real or fictitious, he practised the same devices for ensuring credibility. In all alike he took for granted that the first question people would ask about a story was whether it was true. The novel, it must be remembered, was then in its infancy, and Defoe, as we shall presently see, imagined, probably not without good reason, that his readers would disapprove of story-telling for the mere pleasure of the thing, as an immorality.

In writing for the entertainment of his own time, Defoe took the surest way of writing for the entertainment of all time. Yet if he had never chanced to write *Robinson Crusoe* he would now have a very obscure place in English literature. His "natural infirmity of homely plain writing," as he humorously described it, might have drawn students to his works, but they ran considerable risk of lying in utter oblivion. He was at war with the whole guild of respectable writers who had become classics; they despised him as an illiterate fellow, a vulgar huckster, and never alluded to him except in terms of contempt. He was not slow to retort their civilities; but the retorts might very easily have sunk beneath the waters, while the assaults were preserved by their mutual support. The vast mass of

Defoe's writings received no kindly aid from distinguished contemporaries to float them down the stream ; everything was done that bitter dislike and supercilious indifference could do to submerge them. *Robinson Crusoe* was their sole life-buoy.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the vitality of *Robinson Crusoe* is a happy accident, and that others of Defoe's tales have as much claim in point of merit to permanence. *Robinson Crusoe* has lived longest, because it lives most, because it was detached as it were from its own time and organized for separate existence. It is the only one of Defoe's tales that shows what he could do as an artist. We might have seen from the others that he had the genius of a great artist ; here we have the possibility realized, the convincing proof of accomplished work. *Moll Flanders* is in some respects superior as a novel. Moll is a much more complicated character than the simple, open-minded, manly mariner of York ; a strangely mixed compound of craft and impulse, selfishness and generosity—in short, a thoroughly bad woman, made bad by circumstances. In tracing the vigilant resolution with which she plays upon human weakness, the spasms of compunction which shoot across her wily designs, the selfish afterthoughts which paralyse her generous impulses, her fits of dare-devil courage and uncontrollable panic, and the steady current of good-humoured satisfaction with herself which makes her chuckle equally over mishaps and successes, Defoe has gone much more deeply into the springs of action, and sketched a much richer page in the natural history of his species than in *Robinson Crusoe*. True, it is a more repulsive page, but that is not the only reason why it has fallen into comparative oblivion, and exists now only as a parasite upon the more popular work. It is not equally well constructed for the struggle of existence among books. No book can live for ever which is not firmly organized round some central principle of life, and that principle in itself imperishable. It must have a heart and members ; the members must be soundly compacted and the heart superior to decay. Compared with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders* is only a string of diverting incidents, the lowest type of book organism, very brilliant while it is fresh and new, but not qualified to survive competitors for the world's interest. There is no unique creative purpose in it to bind the whole together ; it might be cut into pieces, each capable of wriggling amusingly by itself. The gradual corruption of the heroine's virtue, which is the encompassing scheme of the tale, is too thin as well as too common an artistic envelope ; the incidents burst through it at so many points that it becomes a shapeless mass. But in *Robinson Crusoe* we have real growth from a vigorous germ. The central idea round which the tale is organized, the position of a man cast ashore on a desert island, abandoned to his own resources, suddenly shot beyond help or counsel from his fellow-creatures, is one that must live as long as the uncertainty of human life.

artist dallied with it, till it finally settled and took root in the mind of the one man of his generation most capable of giving it a home and working out its artistic possibilities. Defoe was the only man of letters in his time who might have been thrown on a desert island without finding himself at a loss what to do. The art required for developing the position in imagination was not of a complicated kind, and yet it is one of the rarest of gifts. Something more was wanted than simply conceiving what a man in such a situation would probably feel and probably do. Above all, it was necessary that his perplexities should be unexpected and his expedients for meeting them unexpected; yet both perplexities and expedients so real and life-like that, when we were told them, we should wonder we had not thought of them before. One gift was indispensable for this, however many might be accessory, the genius of circumstantial invention—not a very exalted order of genius, perhaps, but quite as rare as any other intellectual prodigy.\*

Defoe was fifty-eight years old when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*. If the invention of plausible circumstances is the great secret in the art of that tale, it would have been a marvellous thing if this had been the first instance of its exercise, and it had broken out suddenly in a man of so advanced an age. When we find an artist of supreme excellence in any craft, we generally find that he has been practising it all his life. To say that he has a genius for it, means that he has practised it, and concentrated his main force upon it, and that he has been driven irresistibly to do so by sheer bent of nature. It was so with Defoe and his power of circumstantial invention, his unrivalled genius for "lying like truth." For years upon years of his life it had been his chief occupation. From the time of his first connexion with Harley, at least, he had addressed his countrymen through the press, and had perambulated the length and breadth of the land in assumed characters and on factitious pretexts. His first essay in that way in 1704, when he left prison in the service of the Government, appealing to the general compassion because he was under government displeasure, was skilful enough to suggest great native genius if not extensive previous practice. There are passages of circumstantial invention in the *Review*, as ingenious as anything in *Robinson Crusoe*; and the mere fact that at the end of ten years of secret service under successive Governments, and in spite of a widespread opinion of his untrustworthiness, he was able to pass himself off for ten years more as a Tory with Tories and with the Whig Government as a loyal servant, is a proof of sustained ingenuity of invention greater than many volumes of fiction.

The germ of *Robinson Crusoe*, the actual experience of Alexander Selkirk, went floating about for several years, and more than one

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\* Mr. Leslie Stephen seems to me to underrate the rarity of this peculiar gift in his brilliant essay on Defoe's Novels in *Hours in a Library*.



Looking at Defoe's private life, it is not difficult to understand the peculiar fascination which such a problem as he solved in *Robinson Crusoe* must have had for him. It was not merely that he had passed a life of uncertainty, often on the verge of precipices, and often saved from ruin by a buoyant energy which seems almost miraculous ; not merely that, as he said of himself in one of his diplomatic appeals for commiseration,

“ No man hath tasted differing fortunes more,  
For thirteen times have I been rich and poor.”

But when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, it was one of the actual chances of his life, and by no means a remote one, that he might be cast all alone on an uninhabited island. We see from his letters to De la Faye how fearful he was of having “ mistakes ” laid to his charge by the Government in the course of his secret services. His former changes of party had exposed him, as he well knew, to suspicion. A false step, a misunderstood paragraph, might have had ruinous consequences for him. If the Government had prosecuted him for writing anything offensive to them, refusing to believe that it was put in to amuse the Tories, transportation might very easily have been the penalty. He had made so many enemies in the Press that he might have been transported without a voice being raised in his favour, and the mob would not have interfered to save a Government spy from the Plantations. Shipwreck among the islands of the West Indies was a possibility that stood not far from his own door, as he looked forward into the unknown, and prepared his mind, as men in dangerous situations do, for the worst. When he drew up for Moll Flanders and her husband a list of the things necessary for starting life in a new country, or when he described Colonel Jack's management of his plantation in Virginia, the subject was one of more than general curiosity to him ; and when he exercised his imagination upon the fate of Robinson Crusoe, he was contemplating a fate which a few movements of the wheel of Fortune might make his own.

But whatever it was that made the germ idea of *Robinson Crusoe* take root in Defoe's mind, he worked it out as an artist. Artists of a more emotional type might have drawn much more elaborate and affecting word-pictures of the mariner's feelings in various trying situations, gone much deeper into his changing moods, and shaken our souls with pity and terror over the solitary castaway's alarms and fits of despair. Defoe's aims lay another way. His Crusoe is not a man given to the luxury of grieving. If he had begun to pity himself, he would have been undone. Perhaps Defoe's imaginative force was not of a kind that could have done justice to the agonies of a ship-wrecked sentimentalist; he has left no proof that it was: but if he had represented Crusoe bemoaning his misfortunes, brooding over his fears, or sighing with Ossianic sorrow over his lost companions and

friends, he would have spoiled the consistency of the character. The lonely man had his moments of panic and his days of dejection, but they did not dwell in his memory. Defoe no doubt followed his own natural bent, but he also showed true art in confining Crusoe's recollections as closely as he does to his efforts to extricate himself from difficulties that would have overwhelmed a man of softer temperament. The subject had fascinated him, and he found enough in it to engross his powers without travelling beyond its limits for diverting episodes, as he does more or less in all the rest of his tales. The diverting episodes in *Robinson Crusoe* all help the verisimilitude of the story.

When, however, the ingenious inventor had completed the story artistically, carried us through all the outcast's anxieties and efforts, and shown him triumphant over all difficulties, prosperous, and again in communication with the outer world, the spirit of the itenary trader would not let the finished work alone. The story, as a work of art, ends with Crusoe's departure from the island, or at any rate with his return to England. Its unity is then complete. But Robinson Crusoe at once became a popular hero, and Defoe was too keen a man of business to miss the chance of further profit from so lucrative a vein. He did not mind the sneers of hostile critics. They made merry over the trifling inconsistencies in the tale. How, for example, they asked, could Crusoe have stuffed his pockets with biscuits when he had taken off all his clothes before swimming to the wreck? How could he have been at such a loss for clothes after those he had put off were washed away by the rising tide, when he had the ship's stores to choose from? How could he have seen the goat's eyes in the cave when it was pitch dark? How could the Spaniards give Friday's father an agreement in writing, when they had neither paper nor ink? How did Friday come to know so intimately the habits of bears, the bear not being a denizen of the West Indian Islands? On the ground of these and such-like trifles, one critic declared that the book seems calculated for the mob, and will not bear the eye of a rational reader, and that "all but the very canaille are satisfied of the worthlessness of the performance. Defoe, we may suppose, was not much moved by these strictures, as edition after edition of the work was demanded. He corrected one or two little inaccuracies, and at once set about writing a Second Part, and a volume of *Serious Reflections* which had occurred to Crusoe amidst his adventures. These were purely commercial excrescences upon the original work. They were popular enough at the time, but those who are tempted now to accompany Crusoe in his second visit to his island and his enterprising travels in the East, agree that the Second Part is of inferior interest to the first, and very few now read the *Serious Reflections*.

The *Serious Reflections*, however, are well worth reading in connexion with the author's personal history. In the preface we are

told that *Robinson Crusoe* is an allegory, and in one of the chapters we are told why it is an allegory. The explanation is given in a homily against the vice of talking falsely. By talking falsely the moralist explains that he does not mean telling lies, that is, falsehoods concocted with an evil object: these he puts aside as sins altogether beyond the pale of discussion. But there is a minor vice of falsehood which he considers it his duty to reprove, namely, telling stories, as too many people do, merely to amuse. "This supplying a story by invention," he says, "is certainly a most scandalous crime, and yet very little regarded in that part. It is a sort of lying that makes a great hole in the heart, in which by degrees a habit of lying enters in. Such a man comes quickly up to a total disregarding the truth of what he says, looking upon it as a trifle, a thing of no import, whether any story he tells be true or not." How empty a satisfaction is this "purchased at so great an expense as that of conscience, and of a dishonour done to truth!" And the crime is so entirely objectless. A man who tells a lie, properly so called, has some hope of reward by it. But to lie for sport is to play at shuttlecock with your soul, and load your conscience for the mere sake of being a fool. "With what temper should I speak of those people? What words can express the meanness and baseness of the mind that can do this?" In making this protest against frivolous story-telling, the humour of which must have been greatly enjoyed by his journalistic colleagues, Defoe anticipated that his readers would ask why, if he so disapproved of the supplying a story by invention, he had written *Robinson Crusoe*. His answer was that *Robinson Crusoe* was an allegory, and that the telling or writing a parable or an allusive allegorical history is quite a different case. "I, Robinson Crusoe, do affirm that the story, though allegorical, is also historical, and that it is the beautiful representation of a life of unexampled misfortunes, and of a variety not to be met with in this world." This life was his own. He explains at some length the particulars of the allegory:—

"Thus the fright and fancies which succeeded the story of the print of a man's foot, and surprise of the old goat, and the thing rolling on my bed, and my jumping up in a fright, are all histories and real stories; as are likewise the dream of being taken by messengers, being arrested by officers, the manner of being driven on shore by the surge of the sea, the ship on fire, the description of starving, the story of my man Friday, and many more most natural passages observed here, and on which any religious reflections are made are all historical and true in fact. It is most real that I had a parrot, and taught it to call me by my name, such a servant a savage and afterwards a Christian, and that his name was called Friday, and that he was ravished from me by force, and died in the hands that took him, which I represent by being killed; this is all literally true; and should I enter into discoveries many alive can testify them. His other conduct and assistance to me also have just references in all their parts to the helps I had from that faithful savage in my real solitudes and disasters.

"The story of the bear in the tree, and the fight with the wolves in the snow, is likewise matter of real history: and in a word, the adventures of Robinson Crusoe are a whole scheme of a life of twenty-eight years spent in the most wandering, desolate, and afflicting circumstances that ever man went through, and in which I



have lived so long in a life of wonders, in continued storms, fought with the worst kind of savages and man-eaters, by unaccountable surprising incidents; fed by miracles greater than that of the ravens, suffered all manner of violences and oppressions, injurious reproaches, contempt of men, attacks of devils, corrections from Heaven, and oppositions on earth; and had innumerable ups and downs in matters of fortune, been in slavery worse than Turkish, escaped by an exquisite management, as that in the story of Xury and the boat of Sallee, been taken up at sea in distress, raised again and depressed again, and that oftener perhaps in one man's life than ever was known before; shipwrecked oftener, though more by land than by sea: in a word, there's not a circumstance in the imaginary story but has its just allusion to a real story, and chimes part for part, and step for step, with the inimitable life of Robinson Crusoe."

But if Defoe had such a regard for the strict and literal truth, why did he not tell his history in his own person? Why convey the facts allusively in an allegory? To this question also he had an answer. He wrote for the instruction of mankind, for the purpose of recommending "invincible patience under the worst of misery; indefatigable application and undaunted resolution under the greatest and most discouraging circumstances."

"Had the common way of writing a man's private history been taken, and I had given you the conduct or life of a man you knew, and whose misfortunes and infirmities perhaps you had sometimes unjustly triumphed over, all I could have said would have yielded no diversion, and perhaps scarce have obtained a reading, or at best no attention; the teacher, like a greater, having no honour in his own country."

For all Defoe's profession that *Robinson Crusoe* is an allegory of his own life, it would be rash to take what he says too literally. The reader who goes to the tale in search of a close allegory, in minute chronological correspondence with the facts of the alleged original, will find, I expect, like myself, that he has gone on a wild-goose chase. There is a certain general correspondence. Defoe's own life is certainly as instructive as Crusoe's in the lesson of invincible patience and undaunted resolution. The shipwreck perhaps corresponds with his first bankruptcy, with which it coincides in point of time, having happened just twenty-eight years before. If Defoe had a real man Friday, who had learnt all his arts till he could practise them as well as himself, the fact might go to explain his enormous productiveness as an author. But I doubt whether the allegory can be pushed into such details. Defoe's fancy was quick enough to give an allegorical meaning to any tale. He might have found in Moll Flanders, with her five marriages and ultimate prostitution, corresponding to his own five political marriages and the dubious conduct of his later years, a closer allegory in some respects than in the life of the shipwrecked sailor. The idea of calling *Robinson Crusoe* an allegory was in all probability an after-thought, perhaps suggested by a derisive parody which had appeared, entitled *The life and strange surprising adventures of Daniel de Foe, of London, Hosier, who lived all alone in the uninhabited island of Great Britain*, and so forth.

If we study any writing of Defoe's in connexion with the circum-

stances of its production, we find that it is many-sided in its purposes, as full of side aims as a nave is full of spokes. These supplementary moral chapters to *Robinson Crusoe*, admirable as the reflections are in themselves, and naturally as they are made to arise out of the incidents of the hero's life, contain more than meets the eye till we connect them with the author's position. Calling the tale an allegory served him in two ways. In the first place, it added to the interest of the tale itself by presenting it in the light of a riddle, which was left but half-revealed, though he declared after such explanation as he gave that "the riddle was now expounded, and the intelligent reader might see clearly the end and design of the whole work." In the second place, the allegory was such an image of his life as he wished, for good reasons, to impress on the public mind. He had all along, as we have seen, while in the secret service of successive governments, vehemently protested his independence, and called Heaven and Earth to witness that he was a poor struggling, unfortunate, calumniated man. It was more than ever necessary now when people believed him to be under the insuperable displeasure of the Whigs, and he was really rendering them such dangerous service in connexion with the Tory journals, that he should convince the world of his misfortunes and his honesty. The *Serious Reflections* consist mainly of meditations on Divine Providence in times of trouble, and discourses on the supreme importance of honest dealing. They are put into the mouth of Robinson Crusoe, but the reader is warned that they occurred to the author himself in the midst of real incidents in his own life. Knowing what public repute said of him, he does not profess never to have strayed from the paths of virtue, but he implies that he is sincerely repentant, and is now a reformed character. "Wild wicked Robinson Crusoe does not pretend to honesty himself." He acknowledges his early errors. Not to do so would be a mistaken piece of false bravery. "All shame is cowardice. The bravest spirit is the best qualified for a penitent. He, then, that will be honest, must dare to confess that he has been a knave." But the man that has been sick is half a physician, and therefore he is both well fitted to counsel others, and being convinced of the sin and folly of his former errors, is of all men the least likely to repeat them. Want of courage was not a feature in Defoe's diplomacy. He thus boldly described the particular form of dishonesty with which, when he wrote the description, he was practising upon the unconscious Mr. Mist:

"There is an ugly word called cunning, which is very pernicious to it [honesty], and which particularly injures it by hiding it from our discovery and making it hard to find. This is so like honesty that many a man has been deceived with it, and have taken one for t'other in the markets: nay, I have heard of some who have planted this *wild honesty*, as we may call it, in their own ground, have made use of it in their friendship and dealings, and thought it had been the true plant. But they always lost credit by it, and that was not the worst either, for they had the loss who dealt with them, and who chaffered for a counterfeit commodity; and we find

many deceived so still, which is the occasion there is such an outcry about false friends, and about sharpening and tricking in men's ordinary dealings with the world."

A master-mind in the art of working a man, as Bacon calls it, is surely apparent here. Who could have suspected the moralist of concealing the sins he was inclined to, by exposing and lamenting those very sins? There are other passages in the *Serious Reflections* which seem to have been particularly intended for Mist's edification. In reflecting what a fine thing honesty is, Crusoe expresses an opinion that it is much more common than is generally supposed, and gratefully recalls how often he has met with it in his own experience. He asks the reader to note how faithfully he was served by the English sailor's widow, the Portuguese captain, the Xury, and his man Friday. From these allegoric types, Mist might select a model for his own behaviour. When we consider the tone of these *Serious Reflections*, so eminently pious, moral, and unpretending, so obviously the outcome of a wise, simple, ingenuous nature, we can better understand the fury with which Mist turned upon Defoe when at last he discovered his treachery. They are of use also in throwing light upon the prodigious versatility which could dash off a masterpiece in fiction, and, before the printer's ink was dry, be ready at work making it a subordinate instrument in a much wider and more wonderful scheme of activity, his own restless life.

It is curious to find among the *Serious Reflections* a passage which may be taken as an apology for the practises into which Defoe, gradually, we may reasonably believe, allowed himself to fall. The substance of the apology has been crystalised into an aphorism by the author of *Becky Sharp*, but it has been, no doubt, the consoling philosophy of dishonest persons not altogether devoid of conscience in all ages.

"Necessity makes an honest man a knave : and if the world was to be the judge, according to the common received notion, there would not be an honest poor man alive.

"A rich man is an honest man, no thanks to him, for he would be a double knave to cheat mankind when he had no need of it. He has no occasion to prey upon his integrity, nor so much as to touch upon the borders of dishonesty. Tell me of a man that is a very honest man ; for he pays everybody punctually, runs into nobody's debt, does no man any wrong ; very well, what circumstances is he in ? Why, he has a good estate, a fine yearly income, and no business to do. The Devil must have full possession of this man, if he should be a knave ; for no man commits evil for the sake of it ; even the Devil himself has some farther design in sinning, than barely the wicked part of it. No man is so hardened in crimes as to commit them for the mere pleasure of the fact ; there is always some vice gratified ; ambition, pride, or avarice makes rich men knaves, and necessity the poor."

This is Defoe's excuse for his backslidings put into the mouth of *Robinson Crusoe*. It might be inscribed also on the threshold of each of his fictitious biographies. Colonel Jack, Moll Flanders, Roxana, are not criminals from malice ; they do not commit crimes for the



mere pleasure of the fact. They all believe that but for the force of circumstances they might have been orderly, contented, virtuous members of society.

A Colonel, a London Arab, a child of the criminal regiment, began to steal before he knew that it was not the approved way of making a livelihood. Moll and Roxana were overreached by acts against which they were too weak to cope. Even after they were tempted into taking the wrong turning, they did not pursue the downward road without compunction. Many good people might say of them, "There, but for the grace of God, goes myself." But it was not from the point of view of a Baxter or a Bunyan that Defoe regarded them, though he credited them with many edifying reflections. He was careful to say that he would never have written the stories of their lives, if he had not thought that they would be useful as awful examples of the effects of bad education and the indulgence of restlessness and vanity; but he enters into their ingenious shifts and successes with a joyous sympathy that would have been impossible if their reckless adventurous living by their wits had not had a strong charm for him. We often find peeping out in Defoe's writings that roguish cynicism which we should expect in a man whose own life was so far from being straightforward. He was too much dependent upon the public acceptance of honest professions to be eager in depreciating the value of the article, but when he found other people protesting disinterested motives, he could not always resist reminding them that they were no more disinterested than the Jack-pudding who avowed that he cured diseases from mere love of his kind. Having yielded to circumstances himself, and finding life enjoyable in dubious paths, he had a certain animosity against those who had maintained their integrity and kept to the highroad, and a corresponding pleasure in showing that the motives of the sinner were not after all so very different from the motives of the saint.

The aims in life of Defoe's thieves and pirates are at bottom very little different from the ambition which he undertakes to direct in the *Complete English Tradesman*, and their maxims of conduct have much in common with this ideal. Self-interest is on the look-out and Self-reliance at the helm.

"A tradesman behind his counter must have no flesh and blood about him, no passions, no resentment; he must never be angry—no, not so much as seem to be so, if a customer tumbles him five hundred pounds' worth of goods, and scarce bids money for anything; nay, though they really come to his shop with no intent to buy, as many do, only to see what is to be sold, and though he knows they cannot be better pleased than they are at some other shop where they intend to buy, 'tis all one: the tradesman must take it, he must place it to the account of his calling, that 'tis his business to be ill-used, and resent nothing; and so must answer as obligingly to those who give him an hour or two's trouble, and buy nothing, as he does to those who, in half the time, lay out ten or twenty pounds. The case is plain; and if some do give him trouble, and do not buy, others make amends and do buy; and as for the trouble, 'tis the business of the shop."

All Defoe's heroes and heroines are animated by this practical spirit, this thoroughgoing subordination of means to ends. When they have an end in view, the plunder of a house, the capture of a ship, the ensnaring of a dupe, they allow neither passion, nor resentment, nor sentiment in any shape or form to stand in their way. Every other consideration is put on one side when the business of the shop has to be attended to. They are all tradesmen who have strayed into unlawful courses. They have nothing about them of the heroism of sin ; their crimes are not the result of ungovernable passion, or even of antipathy to conventional restraints ; circumstances and not any law-defying bias of disposition have made them criminals. How is it that the novelist contrives to make them so interesting ? Is it because we are a nation of shopkeepers, and enjoy following lines of business which are a little out of our ordinary routine ? Or is it simply that he makes us enjoy their courage and cleverness without thinking of the purposes with which these qualities are displayed ? Defoe takes such delight in tracing their bold expedients, their dexterous intriguing and manœuvring, that he seldom allows us to think of anything but the success or failure of their enterprises. Our attention is concentrated on the game, and we pay no heed for the moment to the players or the stakes. Charles Lamb says of *The Complete English Tradesman* that " such is the bent of the book to narrow and to degrade the heart, that if such maxims were as catching and infectious as those of a licentious cast, which happily is not the case, had I been living at that time, I certainly should have recommended to the grand jury of Middlesex, who presented *The Fable of the Bees*, to have presented this book of Defoe's in preference, as of a far more vile and debasing tendency. Yet if Defoe had thrown the substance of this book into the form of a novel, and shown us a tradesman rising by the sedulous practise of its maxims from errand-boy to gigantic capitalist, it would have been hardly less interesting than his lives of successful thieves and tolerably successful harlots, and its interest would have been very much of the same kind—the interest of dexterous adaptation of means to ends.

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## CHAPTER X.

### HIS MYSTERIOUS END.

" THE best step," Defoe says, after describing the character of a deceitful talker, " such a man can take is to lie on, and this shows the singularity of the crime ; it is a strange expression, but I shall make it out ; their way is, I say, to lie on till their character is completely

known, and then they can lie no longer, for he whom nobody deceives can deceive nobody, and the essence of lying is removed; for the description of a lie is that it is spoken to deceive, or the design is to deceive. Now, he that nobody believes can never lie any more, because nobody can be deceived by him."

Something like this seems to have happened to Defoe himself. He touched the summit of his worldly prosperity about the time of the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). He was probably richer than then he had been when he enjoyed the confidence of King William, and was busy with projects of manufacture and trade. He was no longer solitary in journalism. Like his hero, he had several plantations and companions to help him in working them. He was connected with four journals, and from this source alone his income must have been considerable. Besides this, he was producing separate works at the rate, on an average, of six a year, some of them pamphlets, some of them considerable volumes, all of them calculated to the wants of the time, and several of them extremely popular, running through three or four editions in as many months. Then he had his salary from the Government, which he delicately hints at in one of his extant letters as being overdue. Further, the advertisement of a lost pocket-book in 1726, containing a list of Notes and Bills, in which Defoe's name twice appears, seems to show that he still found time for commercial transactions outside literature.\* Altogether Defoe was exceedingly prosperous, dropped all pretence of poverty, built a large house at Stoke Newington, with stables and pleasure-grounds, and kept a coach.

We get a pleasant glimpse of Defoe's life at this period from the notes of Henry Baker, the naturalist, who married one of his daughters and received his assistance, as we have seen, in starting *The Universal Spectator*. Baker, originally a bookseller, in 1724 set up a school for the deaf and dumb at Newington. There, according to the notes which he left of his courtship, he made the acquaintance of "Mr. Defoe, a gentleman well known by his writings, who had newly built there a very handsome house, as a retirement from London, and amused his time either in the cultivation of a large and pleasant garden or in the pursuit of his studies, which he found means of making very profitable." Defoe "was now at least sixty years of age, afflicted with the gout and stone, but retained all his mental faculties entire." The diarist goes on to say that he "met usually at the tea-table his three lovely daughters, who were admired for their beauty, their education, and their prudent conduct; and if sometimes Mr. Defoe's disorders made company inconvenient, Mr. Baker was entertained by them either singly or together, and that commonly in the garden when the weather was favorable." Mr. Baker

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\* *Lee's Life*, vol. i., pp. 406-7.



fixed his choice on Sophia, the youngest daughter, and, being a prudent lover, began negotiations about the marriage portion, Defoe's part in which is also characteristic. "He knew nothing of Mr. Defoe's circumstances, only imagined, from his very genteel way of living, that he must be able to give his daughter a decent portion; he did not suppose a large one. On speaking to Mr. Defoe, he sanctioned his proposals, and said he hoped he should be able to give her a certain sum specified; but when urged to the point some time afterwards, his answer was that formal articles he thought unnecessary; that he could confide in the honour of Mr. Baker; that when they talked before he did not know the true state of his own affairs; that he found he could not part with any money at present; but at his death his daughter's portion would be more than he had promised; and he offered his own bond as security." The prudent Mr. Baker would not take his bond, and the marriage was not arranged till two years afterwards, when Defoe gave a bond for £500, payable at his death, engaging his house at Newington as security.

Very little more is known about Defoe's family, except that his eldest daughter married a person of the name of Langley, and that he speculated successfully in South Sea Stock in the name of his second daughter, and afterwards settled upon her an estate at Colchester worth £1020. His second son, named Benjamin, became a journalist, was the editor of the *London Journal*, and got into temporary trouble for writing a scandalous and seditious libel in that newspaper in 1721. A writer in *Applebee's Journal*, whom Mr. Lee identifies with Defoe himself, commenting upon this circumstance, denied the rumour of its being the well-known Daniel Defoe that was committed for the offence. The same writer declared that it was known "that the young Defoe was but a stalking-horse and a tool, to bear the lash and the pillory in their stead, for his wages; that he was the author of the most scandalous part, but was only made sham proprietor of the whole, to screen the true proprietors from justice."

This son does not appear in a favourable light in the troubles which soon after fell upon Defoe, when Mist discovered his connexion with the Government. Foiled in his assault upon him, Mist seems to have taken revenge by spreading the fact abroad, and all Defoe's indignant denials and outcries against Mist's ingratitude do not seem to have cleared him from suspicion. Thenceforth the printers and editors of journals held aloof from him. Such is Mr. Lee's fair interpretation of the fact that his connection with *Applebee's Journal* terminated abruptly in March, 1726, and that he is found soon after, in the preface to a pamphlet on *Street Robberies*, complaining that none of the journals will accept his communications. "Assure yourself, gentle reader," he says,\* "I had not published my project in

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\* Lee's *Life*, vol. i. p. 418.

this pamphlet, could I have got it inserted in any of the journals without feeing the journalists or publishers. I cannot but have the vanity to think they might as well have inserted what I send them, *gratis*, as many things I have since seen in their papers. But I have not only had the mortification to find what I sent rejected, but to lose my originals, not having taken copies of what I wrote." In this preface Defoe makes touching allusion to his age and infirmities. He begs his readers to "excuse the vanity of an over-officious old man, if, like Cato, he inquires whether or no before he goes hence and is no more, he can yet do anything for the service of his country." "The old man cannot trouble you long; take, then, in good part his best intentions, and impute his defects to age and weakness."

This preface was written in 1728; what happened to Defoe in the following year is much more difficult to understand, and is greatly complicated by a long letter of his own which has been preserved. Something had occurred, or was imagined by him to have occurred, which compelled him to fly from his home and go into hiding. He was at work on a book to be entitled *The Complete English Gentleman*. Part of it was already in type when he broke off abruptly in September, 1729, and fled. In August, 1730, he sent from a hiding-place, cautiously described as being about two miles from Greenwich, a letter to his son-in-law, Baker, which is our only clue to what had taken place. It is so incoherent as to suggest that the old man's prolonged toils and anxieties had at last shaken his reason, though not his indomitable self-reliance. Baker apparently had written complaining that he was debarred from seeing him. "Depend upon my sincerity for this," Defoe answers, "that I am far from debarring you. On the contrary, it would be a greater comfort to me than any I now enjoy that I could have your agreeable visits with safety, and could see both you and my dear Sophia, could it be without giving her the grief of seeing her father *in tenebris*, and under the load of insupportable sorrows." He gives a touching description of the griefs which are preying upon his mind.

"It is not the blow I received from a wicked, perjured, and contemptible enemy that has broken in upon my spirit; which, as she well knows, has carried me on through greater disasters than these. But it has been the injustice, unkindness, and I must say inhuman dealing of my own son, which has both ruined my family, and in a word has broken my heart. . . . I depended upon him, I trusted him, I gave up my two dear unprovided children into his hands; but he has no compassion, but suffers them and their poor dying mother to beg their bread at his door, and to crave, as it were, an alms, what he is bound under hand and seal, besides the most sacred promises, to supply them with, himself at the same time living in a profusion of plenty. It is too much for me. Excuse my infirmity. I can say no more; my heart is too full. I only ask one thing of you as a dying request. Stand by them when I am gone, and let them not be wronged while he is able to do them right. Stand by them as brother and if you have anything within you owing to my memory, who have bestowed on you the best gift I have to give, let them not be injured and trampled on by false pretences and unnatural reflections. I hope they will want no help but that of comfort and counsel: but that they will indeed want, being too easy to be managed by words and promises."

The postscript to the letter shows that Baker had written to him about selling the house, which, it may be remembered, was the security for Mrs. Baker's portion, and had inquired about a policy of assurance. "I wrote you a letter some months ago, in answer to one from you, about selling the house; but you never signified to me whether you received it. I have not the policy of assurance; I suppose my wife, or Hannah, may have it." Baker's ignoring the previous letter about the house seems to signify that it was unsatisfactory. He apparently wished for a personal interview with Defoe. In the beginning of the present letter Defoe had said that, though far from debarring a visit from his son-in-law, circumstances, much to his sorrow, made it impossible that he could receive a visit from anybody. After the charge against his son, which we have quoted, he goes on to explain that it is impossible for him to go to see Mr. Baker. His family apparently had been ignorant of his movements for some time. "I am at a distance from London, in Kent; nor have I a lodging in London, nor have I been at that place in the Old Bailey since I wrote you I was removed from it. At present I am weak, having had some fits of a fever that have left me low." He suggests, indeed, a plan by which he might see his son-in-law and daughter. He could not bear to make them a single flying visit. "Just to come and look at you and retire immediately, 'tis a burden too heavy. The parting will be a price beyond the enjoyment. But if they could find a retired lodging for him at Enfield, "where he might not be known, and might have the comfort of seeing them both now and then, upon such a circumstance he could gladly give the days to solitude to have the comfort of half an hour now and then with them both for two or three weeks." Nevertheless, as if he considered this plan out of the question, he ends with a touching expression of grief that, being near his journey's end, he may never see them again. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that he did not wish to see his son-in-law, and that Baker wished to see him about money matters, and suspected him of evading an interview.

Was this evasion the cunning of incipient madness? Was his concealing his hiding-place from his son-in-law an insane development of that self-reliant caution, which for so many years of his life he had been compelled to make a habit, in the face of the most serious risks? Why did he give such an exaggerated colour to the infamous conduct of his son? It is easy to make out from the passage I have quoted, what his son's guilt really consisted in. Defoe had assigned certain property to the son to be held in trust for his wife and daughters. The son had not secured them in the enjoyment of this provision, but maintained them, and gave them words and promises, with which they were content, that he would continue to maintain them. It was this that Defoe called making them "beg their bread at his door, and crave as if it were an alms" the pro-



vision to which they were legally entitled. Why did Defoe vent his grief at this conduct in such strong language to his son-in-law, at the same time enjoining him to make a prudent use of it? Baker had written to his father-in-law making inquiry about the securities for his wife's portion; Defoe answers with profuse expressions of affection, a touching picture of his old age and feebleness, and the imminent ruin of his family through the possible treachery of the son to whom he has entrusted their means of support, and an adjuration to his son-in-law to stand by them with comfort and counsel when he is gone. The inquiry about the securities he dismisses in a postscript. He will not sell the house, and he does not know who has the policy of assurance.

One thing and one thing only shines clearly out of the obscurity in which Defoe's closing years are wrapt—his earnest desire to make provision for those members of his family who could not provide for themselves. The pursuit from which he was in hiding, was in all probability the pursuit of creditors. We have seen that his income must have been large from the year 1718 or thereabouts, till his utter loss of credit in journalism about the year 1726; but he may have had old debts. It is difficult to explain otherwise why he should have been at such pains, when he became prosperous, to assign property to his children. There is evidence, as early as 1720, of his making over property to his daughter Hannah, and the letter from which I have quoted shows that he did not hold his Newington estate in his own name. In this letter he speaks of a perjured, contemptible enemy as the cause of his misfortunes. Mr. Lee conjectures that this was Mist, that Mist had succeeded in embroiling him with the Government by convincing them of treachery in his secret services, and that this was the hue and cry from which he fled. But it is hardly conceivable that the Government could have listened to charges brought by a man whom they had driven from the country for his seditious practices. It is much more likely that Mist and his supporters had sufficient interest to instigate the revival of old pecuniary claims against Defoe.

It would have been open to suppose that the fears which made the old man a homeless wanderer and fugitive for the last two years of his life, were wholly imaginary, but for the circumstances of his death. He died of a lethargy on the 26th of April, 1731, at a lodging in Rope-maker's Alley, Moorfields. In September, 1733, as the books in Doctors' Commons show, letters of administration on his goods and chattels were granted to Mary Brooks, widow, a creditrix, after summoning in official form the next of kin to appear. Now, if Defoe had been driven from his home by imaginary fears, and had baffled with the cunning of insane suspicion the efforts of his family to bring him back, there is no apparent reason why they should not have claimed his effects after his death. He could not have died unknown to them,

for place and time were recorded in the newspapers. His letter to his son-in-law, expressing the warmest affection for all his family except his son, is sufficient to prevent the horrible notion that he might have been driven forth like Lear by his undutiful children after he had parted his goods among them. If they had been capable of such unnatural conduct, they would not have failed to secure his remaining property. Why, then, were his goods and chattels left to a creditrix? Mr. Lee ingeniously suggests that Mary Brooks was the keeper of the lodging where he died, and that she kept his personal property to pay rent and perhaps funeral expenses. A much simpler explanation, which covers most of the known facts without casting any unwarranted reflections upon Defoe's children, is that when his last illness overtook him he was still keeping out of the way of his creditors, and that everything belonging to him in his own name was legally seized. But there are doubts and difficulties attending any explanation.

Mr. Lee has given satisfactory reasons for believing that Defoe did not, as some of his biographers have supposed, die in actual distress. Ropemaker's Alley in Moorfields was a highly respectable street at the beginning of last century; a lodging there was far from squalid. The probability is that Defoe subsisted on his pension from the Government during his last two years of wandering; and suffering though he was from the infirmities of age, yet wandering was less of a hardship than it would have been to other men, to one who had been a wanderer for the greater part of his life. At the best it was a painful and dreary ending for so vigorous a life, and unless we pitilessly regard it as a retribution for his moral defects, it is some comfort to think that the old man's infirmities and anxieties were not aggravated by the pressure of hopeless and helpless poverty. Nor do I think that he was as distressed as he represented to his son-in-law by apprehensions of ruin to his family after his death, and suspicions of the honesty of his son's intentions. There is a half insane tone about his letter to Mr. Baker, but a certain method may be discerned in its incoherencies. My own reading of it is that it was a clever evasion of his son-in-law's attempts to make sure of his share of the inheritance. We have seen how shifty Defoe was in the original bargaining about his daughter's portion, and we know from his novels what his views were about fortune-hunters, and with what delight he dwelt upon the arts of outwitting them. He probably considered that his youngest daughter was sufficiently provided for by her marriage, and he had set his heart upon making provision for her unmarried sisters. The letter seems to me to be evidence, not so much of fears for their future welfare, as of a resolution to leave them as much as he could. Two little circumstances seem to show that, in spite of his professions of affection, there was a coolness between Defoe and his son-in-law. He wrote only the prospectus and the first article for Baker's paper, the *Universal Spectator*, and when he died, Baker contented himself with a simple intimation of the fact.

If my reading of this letter is right, it might stand as a type of the most strongly marked characteristic in Defoe's political writings. It was a masterly and utterly unscrupulous piece of diplomacy for the attainment of a just and benevolent end. This may appear strange after what I have said about Defoe's want of honesty, yet one cannot help coming to this conclusion in looking back at his political career before his character underwent its final degradation. He was a great, a truly great liar, perhaps the greatest liar that ever lived. His dishonesty went too deep to be called superficial, yet, if we go deeper still in his rich and strangely mixed nature, we come upon stubborn foundations of conscience. Among contemporary comments on the occasion of his death, there was one which gave perfect expression to his political position. "His knowledge of men, especially those in high life (with whom he was formerly very conversant) had weakened his attachment to any political party; but, in the main, he was in the interest of civil and religious liberty, in behalf of which he appeared on several remarkable occasions." The men of the time with whom Defoe was brought into contact were not good examples to him. The standard of political morality was probably never so low in England as during his lifetime. Places were dependent on the favour of the Sovereign, and the Sovereign's own seat on the throne was insecure; there was no party cohesion to keep politicians consistent, and every man fought for his own hand. Defoe had been behind the scenes, witnessed many curious changes of service, and heard many authentic tales of jealousy, intrigue, and treachery. He had seen Jacobites take office under William, join zealously in the scramble for his favours, and enter into negotiations with the emissaries of James either upon some fancied slight, or from no other motive than a desire to be safe, if by any chance the sceptre should again change hands. Under Anne he had seen Whig turn Tory and Tory turn Whig, and had seen statesmen of the highest rank hold out one hand to Hanover and another to St. Germain. The most single-minded man he had met had been King William himself, and of his memory he always spoke with the most affectionate honour. Shifty as Defoe was, and admirably as he used his genius for circumstantial invention to cover his designs, there was no other statesman of his generation who remained more true to the principles of the Revolution, and to the cause of civil and religious freedom. No other public man saw more clearly what was for the good of the country, or pursued it more steadily. Even when he was the active servant of Harley, and turned round upon men who regarded him as their own, the part which he played was to pave the way for his patron's accession to office under the House of Hanover. Defoe did as much as any one man, partly by secret intrigue, partly through the public press, perhaps as much as any ten men outside those in the immediate direction of affairs, to accomplish the two great objects which William bequeathed to English statesmanship—



the union of England and Scotland, and the succession to the United Kingdom of a Protestant dynasty. Apart from the field of high politics, his powerful advocacy was enlisted in favour of almost every practical scheme of social improvement that came to the front in his time. Defoe cannot be held up as an exemplar of moral conduct, yet if he is judged by the measures that he laboured for and not by the means that he employed, few Englishmen have lived more deserving than he of their country's gratitude. He may have been self-seeking and vain-glorious, but in his political life self-seeking and vain-glory were elevated by their alliance with higher and wider aims. Defoe was a wonderful mixture of knave and patriot ; sometimes pure knave seems to be uppermost, sometimes pure patriot ; but the mixture is so complex, and the energy of the man so restless, that it almost passes human skill to unravel the two elements. The author of *Robinson Crusoe* is entitled to the benefit of every doubt.

# SAMUEL JOHNSON.

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN.





# SAMUEL JOHNSON.

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## CHAPTER I.

### CHILDHOOD AND EARLY LIFE.

SAMUEL JOHNSON was born in Lichfield in 1709. His father, Michael Johnson, was a bookseller, highly respected by the cathedral clergy, and for a time sufficiently prosperous to be a magistrate of the town, and, in the year of his son's birth, sheriff of the county. He opened a bookstall on market-days at neighbouring towns, including Birmingham, which was as yet unable to maintain a separate bookseller. The tradesman often exaggerates the prejudices of the class whose wants he supplies, and Michael Johnson was probably a more devoted High Churchman and Tory than many of the cathedral clergy themselves. He reconciled himself with difficulty to taking the oaths against the exiled dynasty. He was a man of considerable mental and physical power, but tormented by hypochondriacal tendencies. His son inherited a share both of his constitution and his principles. Long afterwards Samuel associated with his childish days a faint but solemn recollection of a lady in diamonds and long black hood. The lady was Queen Anne, to whom, in compliance with a superstition just dying a natural death, he had been taken by his mother to be touched for the king's evil. The touch was ineffectual. Perhaps, as Boswell suggested, he ought to have been presented to the genuine heirs of the Stuarts in Rome. Disease and superstition had thus stood by his cradle, and they never quitted him during life. The demon of hypochondria was always lying in wait for him, and could be exorcised for a time only by hard work or social excitement. Of this we shall hear enough ; but it may be as well to sum up at once some of the physical characteristics which marked him through life and greatly influenced his career.

The disease had scarred and disfigured features otherwise regular and always impressive. It had seriously injured his eyes, entirely destroying, it seems, the sight of one. He could not, it is said, distinguish a friend's face half a yard off, and pictures were to him meaningless patches, in which he could never see the resemblance to

their objects. The statement is perhaps exaggerated; for he could see enough to condemn a portrait of himself. He expressed some annoyance when Reynolds had painted him with a pen held close to his eye; and protested that he would not be handed down to posterity as "blinking Sam." It seems that habits of minute attention atoned in some degree for this natural defect. Boswell tells us how Johnson once corrected him as to the precise shape of a mountain; and Mrs Thrale says that he was a close and exacting critic of ladies' dress, even to the accidental position of a riband. He could even lay down æsthetical canons upon such matters. He reproved her for wearing a dark dress as unsuitable to a "little creature." "What," he asked, "have not all insects gay colours?" His insensibility to music was even more pronounced than his dullness of sight. On hearing it said, in praise of a musical performance, that it was in any case difficult, his feeling comment was, "I wish it had been impossible!"

The queer convulsions by which he amazed all beholders were probably connected with his disease, though he and Reynolds ascribed them simply to habit. When entering a doorway with his blind companion, Miss Williams, he would suddenly desert her on the step in order to "whirl and twist about" in strange gesticulations. The performance partook of the nature of a superstitious ceremonial. He would stop in a street or the middle of a room to go through it correctly. Once he collected a laughing mob in Twickenham meadows by his antics; his hands imitating the motions of a jockey riding at full speed and his feet twisting in and out to make heels and toes touch alternately. He presently sat down and took out a *Grotius De Veritate*, over which he "seesawed" so violently that the mob ran back to see what was the matter. Once in such a fit he suddenly twisted off the shoe of a lady who sat by him. Sometimes he seemed to be obeying some hidden impulse, which commanded him to touch every post in a street or tread on the centre of every paving-stone, and would return if his task had not been accurately performed.

In spite of such oddities, he was not only possessed of physical power corresponding to his great height and massive stature, but was something of a proficient at athletic exercises. He was conversant with the theory, at least, of boxing; a knowledge probably acquired from an uncle who kept the ring at Smithfield for a year, and was never beaten in boxing or wrestling. His constitutional fearlessness would have made him a formidable antagonist. Hawkins describes the oak staff, six feet in length and increasing from one to three inches in diameter, which lay ready to his hand when he expected an attack from Macpherson of Ossian celebrity. Once he is said to have taken up a chair at the theatre upon which a man had seated himself during his temporary absence, and to have tossed it and its occupant bodily into the pit. He would swim into pools said to be dangerous,

beat huge dogs into peace, climb trees, and even run races and jump gates. Once at least he went out foxhunting, and though he despised the amusement, was deeply touched by the complimentary assertion that he rode as well as the most illiterate fellow in England. Perhaps the most whimsical of his performances was when, in his fifty-fifth year, he went to the top of a high hill with his friend Langton. "I have not had a roll for a long time," said the great lexicographer suddenly, and, after deliberately emptying his pockets, he laid himself parallel to the edge of the hill, and descended, turning over and over till he came to the bottom. We may believe, as Mrs. Thrale remarks upon his jumping over a stool to show that he was not tired by his hunting, that his performances in this kind were so strange and uncouth that a fear for the safety of his bones quenched the spectator's tendency to laugh.

In such a strange case was imprisoned one of the most vigorous intellects of the time. Vast strength hampered by clumsiness and associated with grievous disease, deep and massive powers of feeling limited by narrow though acute perceptions, were characteristic both of soul and body. These peculiarities were manifested from his early infancy. Miss Seward, a typical specimen of the provincial *précieuse*, attempted to trace them in an epitaph which he was said to have written at the age of three.

Here lies good master duck  
Whom Samuel Johnson trod on ;  
If it had lived, it had been good luck,  
For then we had had an odd one.

The verses, however, were really made by his father, who passed them off as the child's, and illustrate nothing but the paternal vanity. In fact the boy was regarded as something of an infant prodigy. His great powers of memory, characteristic of a mind singularly retentive of all impressions, were early developed. He seemed to learn by intuition. Indolence, as in his after life, alternated with brief efforts of strenuous exertion. His want of sight prevented him from sharing in the ordinary childish sports ; and one of his great pleasures was in reading old romances—a taste which he retained through life. Boys of this temperament are generally despised by their fellows ; but Johnson seems to have had the power of enforcing the respect of his companions. Three of the lads used to come for him in the morning and carry him in triumph to school, seated upon the shoulders of one and supported on each side by his companions.

After learning to read at a dame-school, and from a certain Tom Brown, of whom it is only recorded that he published a spelling-book and dedicated it to the Universe, young Samuel was sent to the Lichfield Grammar School, and was afterwards, for a short time, apparently in the character of a pupil-teacher, at the school of Stourbridge, in



Worcestershire. A good deal of Latin was "whipped into him," and though he complained of the excessive severity of two of his teachers, he was always a believer in the virtues of the rod. A child, he said, who is flogged, "gets his task, and there's an end on't; whereas by exciting emulation and comparisons of superiority, you lay the foundations of lasting mischief; you make brothers and sisters hate each other." In practice, indeed, this stern disciplinarian seems to have been specially indulgent to children. The memory of his own sorrows made him value their happiness, and he rejoiced greatly when he at last persuaded a schoolmaster to remit the old-fashioned holiday-task.

Johnson left school at sixteen and spent two years at home, probably in learning his father's business. This seems to have been the chief period of his studies. Long afterwards he said that he knew almost as much at eighteen as he did at the age of fifty-three—the date of the remark. His father's shop would give him many opportunities, and he devoured what came in his way with the indiscriminating eagerness of a young student. His intellectual resembled his physical appetite. He gorged books. He tore the hearts out of them, but did not study systematically. Do you read books through? he asked indignantly of some one who expected from him such supererogatory labour. His memory enabled him to accumulate great stores of a desultory and unsystematic knowledge. Somehow he became a fine Latin scholar, though never first-rate as a Grecian. The direction of his studies was partly determined by the discovery of a folio of Petrarch, lying on a shelf where he was looking for apples; and one of his earliest literary plans, never carried out, was an edition of Politian, with a history of Latin poetry from the time of Petrarch. When he went to the University at the end of this period, he was in possession of a very unusual amount of reading.

Meanwhile he was beginning to feel the pressure of poverty. His father's affairs were probably getting into disorder. One anecdote—it is one which it is difficult to read without emotion—refers to this period. Many years afterwards, Johnson, worn by disease and the hard struggle of life, was staying at Lichfield, where a few old friends still survived, but in which every street must have revived the memories of the many who had long since gone over to the majority. He was missed one morning at breakfast, and did not return till supper-time. Then he told how his time had been passed. On that day fifty years before, his father, confined by illness, had begged him to take his place to sell books at a stall at Uttoxeter. Pride made him refuse. "To do away with the sin of this disobedience, I this day went in a post-chaise to Uttoxeter, and going into the market at the time of high business, uncovered my head and stood with it bare an hour before the stall which my father had formerly used, exposed to the sneers of the standers-by and the inclemency of the weather; a penance by which I trust I have propitiated Heaven for this only

instance, I believe, of contumacy to my father." If the anecdote illustrates the touch of superstition in Johnson's mind, it reveals too that sacred depth of tenderness which ennobled his character. No repentance can ever wipe out the past or make it be as though it had not been; but the remorse of a fine character may be transmuted into a permanent source of nobler views of life and the world.

There are difficulties in determining the circumstances and duration of Johnson's stay at Oxford. He began residence at Pembroke College in 1728. It seems probable that he received some assistance from a gentleman whose son took him as companion, and from the clergy of Lichfield, to whom his father was known, and who were aware of the son's talents. Possibly his college assisted him during part of the time. It is certain that he left without taking a degree, though he probably resided for nearly three years. It is certain, also, that his father's bankruptcy made his stay difficult, and that the period must have been one of trial.

The effect of the Oxford residence upon Johnson's mind was characteristic. The lad already suffered from the attacks of melancholy, which sometimes drove him to the borders of insanity. At Oxford, Law's *Serious Call* gave him the strong religious impressions which remained through life. But he does not seem to have been regarded as a gloomy or a religious youth by his contemporaries. When told in after years that he had been described as a "gay and frolicsome fellow," he replied, "Ah! sir, I was mad and violent. It was bitterness which they mistook for frolic. I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit; so I disregarded all power and all authority." Though a hearty supporter of authority in principle, Johnson was distinguished through life by the strongest spirit of personal independence and self-respect. He held, too, the sound doctrine, deplored by his respectable biographer Hawkins, that the scholar's life, like the Christian's, levelled all distinctions of rank. When an odious benefactor put a pair of new shoes at his door, he threw them away with indignation. He seems to have treated his tutors with a contempt which Boswell politely attributed to "great fortitude of mind," but Johnson himself set down as "stark insensibility." The life of a poor student is not, one may fear, even yet exempt from much bitterness, and in those days the position was far more servile than at present. The servitors and sizers had much to bear from richer companions. A proud, melancholy lad, conscious of great powers, had to meet with hard rebuffs, and tried to meet them by returning scorn for scorn.

Such distresses, however, did not shake Johnson's rooted Toryism. He fully imbibed, if he did not already share, the strongest prejudices of the place, and his misery never produced a revolt against the system, though it may have fostered insolence to individuals. Three

of the most eminent men with whom Johnson came in contact in later life, had also been students at Oxford. Wesley, his senior by six years, was a fellow of Lincoln whilst Johnson was an undergraduate, and was learning at Oxford the necessity of rousing his countrymen from the religious lethargy into which they had sunk. "Have not pride and haughtiness of spirit, impatience and peevishness, sloth and indolence, gluttony and sensuality, and even a proverbial uselessness been objected to us, perhaps not always by our enemies nor wholly without ground?" So said Wesley, preaching before the University of Oxford in 1744, and the words in his mouth imply more than the preacher's formality. Adam Smith, Johnson's junior by fourteen years, was so impressed by the utter indifference of Oxford authorities to their duties, as to find in it an admirable illustration of the consequences of the neglect of the true principles of supply and demand implied in the endowment of learning. Gibbon, his junior by twenty-eight years, passed at Oxford the "most idle and unprofitable" months of his whole life; and was, he said, as willing to disclaim the university for a mother, as she could be to renounce him for a son. Oxford, as judged by these men, was remarkable as an illustration of the spiritual and intellectual decadence of a body which at other times has been a centre of great movements of thought. Johnson, though his experience was rougher than any of the three, loved Oxford as though she had not been a harsh stepmother to his youth. Sir, he said fondly of his college, "we are a nest of singing-birds." Most of the strains are now pretty well forgotten, and some of them must at all times have been such as we scarcely associate with the nightingale. Johnson, however, cherished his college friendships, delighted in paying visits to his old university, and was deeply touched by the academical honours by which Oxford long afterwards recognized an eminence scarcely fostered by its protection. Far from sharing the doctrines of Adam Smith, he only regretted that the universities were not richer, and expressed a desire which will be understood by advocates of the "endowment of research," that there were many places of a thousand a year at Oxford.

On leaving the University, in 1731, the world was all before him. His father died in the end of the year, and Johnson's whole immediate inheritance was twenty pounds. Where was he to turn for daily bread? Even in those days, most gates were barred with gold and opened but to golden keys. The greatest chance for a poor man was probably through the Church. The career of Warburton, who rose from a similar position to a bishopric, might have been rivalled by Johnson, and his connexions with Lichfield might, one would suppose, have helped him to a start. It would be easy to speculate upon causes which might have hindered such a career. In later life, he more than once refused to take orders upon the promise of a living.



Johnson, as we know him, was a man of the world; though a religious man of the world. He represents the secular rather than the ecclesiastical type. So far as his mode of teaching goes, he is rather a disciple of Socrates than of St. Paul or Wesley. According to him, a "tavern-chair" was "the throne of human felicity," and supplied a better arena than the pulpit for the utterance of his message to mankind. And, though his external circumstances doubtless determined his method, there was much in his character which made it congenial. Johnson's religious emotions were such as to make habitual reserve almost a sanitary necessity. They were deeply coloured by his constitutional melancholy. Fear of death and hell were prominent in his personal creed. To trade upon his feelings like a charlatan would have been abhorrent to his masculine character; and to give them full and frequent utterance like a genuine teacher of mankind would have been to imperil his sanity. If he had gone through the excitement of a Methodist conversion, he would probably have ended his days in a madhouse.

Such considerations, however, were not, one may guess, distinctly present to Johnson himself; and the offer of a college fellowship or of private patronage might probably have altered his career. He might have become a learned recluse or a struggling Parson Adams. College fellowships were less open to talent then than now, and patrons were never too propitious to the uncouth giant, who had to force his way by sheer labour, and fight for his own hand. Accordingly, the young scholar tried to coin his brains into money by the most depressing and least hopeful of employments. By becoming an usher in a school, he could at least turn his talents to account with little delay, and that was the most pressing consideration. By one school-master he was rejected on the ground that his infirmities would excite the ridicule of the boys. Under another he passed some months of "complicated misery," and could never think of the school without horror and aversion. Finding this situation intolerable, he settled in Birmingham, in 1733, to be near an old schoolfellow, named Hector, who was apparently beginning to practise as a surgeon. Johnson seems to have had some acquaintances among the comfortable families in the neighbourhood; but his means of living are obscure. Some small literary work came in his way. He contributed essays to a local paper, and translated a book of travels in Abyssinia. For this, his first publication, he received five guineas. In 1734 he made certain overtures to Cave, a London publisher, of the result of which I shall have to speak presently. For the present it is pretty clear that the great problem of self-support had been very inadequately solved.

Having no money and no prospects, Johnson naturally married. The attractions of the lady were not very manifest to others than her husband. She was the widow of a Birmingham mercer named Porter. Her age at the time (1735) of the second marriage was forty-eight, the

bridegroom being not quite twenty-six. The biographer's eye was not fixed upon Johnson till after his wife's death, and we have little in the way of authentic description of her person and character. Garrick, who had known her, said that she was very fat, with cheeks coloured both by paint and cordials, flimsy and fantastic in dress and affected in her manners. She is said to have treated her husband with some contempt, adopting the airs of an antiquated beauty, which he returned by elaborate deference. Garrick used his wonderful powers of mimicry to make fun of the uncouth caresses of the husband, and the courtly Beauclerk used to provoke the smiles of his audience by repeating Johnson's assertion that "it was a love-match on both sides." One incident of the wedding-day was ominous. As the newly married couple rode back from church, Mrs. Johnson showed her spirit by reproaching her husband for riding too fast, and then for lagging behind. Resolved "not to be made the slave of caprice," he pushed on briskly till he was fairly out of sight. When she rejoined him, as he of course took care that she should soon do, she was in tears. Mrs. Johnson apparently knew how to regain supremacy; but, at any rate, Johnson loved her devotedly during life, and clung to her memory during a widowhood of more than thirty years, as fondly as if they had been the most pattern hero and heroine of romantic fiction.

Whatever Mrs. Johnson's charms, she seems to have been a woman of good sense and some literary judgment. Johnson's grotesque appearance did not prevent her from saying to her daughter on their first introduction, "This is the most sensible man I ever met." Her praises were, we may believe, sweeter to him than those of the severest critics, or the most fervent of personal flatterers. Like all good men, Johnson loved good women, and liked to have on hand a flirtation or two, as warm as might be within the bounds of due decorum. But nothing affected his fidelity to his Letty or displaced her image in his mind. He remembered her in many solemn prayers, and such words as "this was dear Letty's book," or, "this was a prayer which dear Letty was accustomed to say," were found written by him in many of her books of devotion.

Mrs. Johnson had one other recommendation—a fortune, namely, of £800—little enough, even then, as a provision for the support of the married pair, but enough to help Johnson make a fresh start. In 1736, there appeared an advertisement in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. "At Edial, near Lichfield, in Staffordshire, young gentlemen are boarded and taught the Latin and Greek languages by Samuel Johnson." If, as seems probable, Mrs. Johnson's money supplied the funds for this venture, it was an unlucky speculation.

Johnson was not fitted to be a pedagogue. Success in that profession implies skill in the management of pupils, but perhaps still more decidedly in the management of parents. Johnson had little qualifi-

cations in either way. As a teacher he would probably have been alternately despotic and over-indulgent; and, on the other hand, at a single glance the rough Dominie Sampson would be enough to frighten the ordinary parent off his premises. Very few pupils came, and they seem to have profited little, if a story as told of two of his pupils refers to this time. After some months of instruction in English history, he asked them who had destroyed the monasteries? One of them gave no answer; the other replied, "Jesus Christ." Johnson, however, could boast of one eminent pupil in David Garrick, though, by Garrick's account, his master was of little service except as affording an excellent mark for his early powers of ridicule. The school, or "academy," failed after a year and a half; and Johnson, once more at a loss for employment, resolved to try the great experiment, made so often and so often unsuccessfully. He left Lichfield to seek his fortune in London. Garrick accompanied him, and the two brought a common letter of introduction to the master of an academy from Gilbert Walmsley, registrar of the Prerogative Court in Lichfield. Long afterwards Johnson took an opportunity in the *Lives of the Poets* of expressing his warm regard for the memory of his early friend, to whom he had been recommended by a community of literary tastes, in spite of party differences and great inequality of age. Walmsley says in his letter, that "one Johnson" is about to accompany Garrick to London, in order to try his fate with a tragedy and get himself employed in translation. Johnson, he adds, "is a very good scholar and poet, and I have great hopes will turn out a fine tragedy writer."

The letter is dated March 2d, 1737. Before recording what is known of his early career thus started, it will be well to take a glance at the general condition of the profession of Literature in England at this period.

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## CHAPTER II.

### LITERARY CAREER.

"No man but a blockhead," said Johnson, "ever wrote except for money." The doctrine is, of course, perfectly outrageous, and specially calculated to shock people who like to keep it for their private use, instead of proclaiming it in public. But it is a good expression of that huge contempt for the foppery of high-flown sentiment which, as is not uncommon with Johnson, passes into something which would be cynical if it were not half-humorous. In this case it implies also the contempt of the professional for the amateur. Johnson despised gentlemen who dabbled in his craft, as a man whose life is devoted to music or painting despises the ladies and gentlemen who treat those



arts as fashionable accomplishments. An author was, according to him, a man who turned out books as a bricklayer turns out houses or a tailor coats. So long as he supplied a good article and got a fair price, he was a fool to grumble, and a humbug to affect loftier motives.

Johnson was not the first professional author, in this sense, but perhaps the first man who made the profession respectable. The principal habitat of authors, in his age, was Grub Street—a region which, in later years, has ceased to be ashamed of itself, and has adopted the more pretentious name Bohemio. The original Grub Street, it is said, first became associated with authorship during the increase of pamphlet literature, produced by the civil wars. Fox, the martyrologist, was one of its original inhabitants. Another of its heroes was a certain Mr. Welby, of whom the sole record is, that he “lived there forty years without being seen of any.” In fact, it was a region of holes and corners, calculated to illustrate that great advantage of London life, which a friend of Boswell’s described by saying, that a man could there be always “close to his burrow.” The “burrow” which received the luckless wight was indeed no pleasant refuge. Since poor Green, in the earliest generation of dramatists, bought his “groat’s worth of wit with a million of repentance,” too many of his brethren had trodden the path which led to hopeless misery or death in a tavern brawl. The history of men who had to support themselves by their pens, is a record of almost universal gloom. The names of Spenser, of Butler, and of Otway, are enough to remind us that even warm contemporary recognition was not enough to raise an author above the fear of dying in want of necessities. The two great dictators of literature, Ben Jonson in the earlier and Dryden in the later part of the century, only kept their heads above water by help of the laureate’s pittance, though reckless imprudence, encouraged by the precarious life, was the cause of much of their sufferings. Patronage gave but a fitful resource, and the author could hope at most but an occasional crust, flung to him from better provided tables.

In the happy days of Queen Anne, it is true, there had been a gleam of prosperity. Many authors, Addison, Congreve, Swift, and others of less name, had won by their pens not only temporary profits but permanent places. The class which came into power at the Revolution was willing for a time to share some of the public patronage with men distinguished for intellectual eminence. Patronage was liberal when the funds came out of other men’s pockets. But as the system of party government developed, it soon became evident that this involved a waste of power. There were enough political partisans to absorb all the comfortable sinecures to be had; and such money as was still spent upon literature, was given in return for services equally degrading to giver and receiver. Nor did the patronage of literature reach the poor inhabitants of Grub Street. Addison’s poetical power might suggest or justify the gift of a place from his elegant

friends ; but a man like Defoe, who really looked to his pen for great part of his daily subsistence, was below the region of such prizes, and was obliged in later years not only to write inferior books for money, but to sell himself and act as a spy upon his fellows. One great man, it is true, made an independence by literature. Pope received some £8000 for his translation of Homer, by the then popular mode of subscription—a kind of compromise between the systems of patronage and public support. But his success caused little pleasure in Grub Street. No love was lost between the poet and the dwellers in this dismal region. Pope was its deadliest enemy, and carried on an internecine warfare with its inmates, which has enriched our language with a great satire, but which wasted his powers upon low objects, and tempted him into disgraceful artifices. The life of the unfortunate victims, pilloried in the *Dunciad* and accused of the unpardonable sins of poverty and dependence, was too often one which might have extorted sympathy even from a thin-skinned poet and critic.

Illustrations of the manners and customs of that Grub Street of which Johnson was to become an inmate are only too abundant. The best writers of the day could tell of hardships endured in that dismal region. Richardson went on the sound principle of keeping his shop that his shop might keep him. But the other great novelists of the century have painted from life the miseries of an author's existence. Fielding, Smollett, and Goldsmith have described the poor wretches with a vivid force which gives sadness to the reflection that each of those great men was drawing upon his own experience, and that they each died in distress. The *Case of Authors by Profession*, to quote the title of a pamphlet by Ralph, was indeed a wretched one, when the greatest of their number had an incessant struggle to keep the wolf from the door. The life of an author resembled the proverbial existence of the flying-fish, chased by enemies in sea and in air ; he only escaped from the slavery of the bookseller's garret, to fly from the bailiff or rot in the debtor's ward or the spunging-house. Many strange half-pathetic and half-ludicrous anecdotes survive to recall the sorrows and the recklessness of the luckless scribblers who, like one of Johnson's acquaintance, "lived in London and hung loose upon society."

There was Samuel Boyse, for example, whose poem on the *Deity* is quoted with high praise by Fielding. Once Johnson had generously exerted himself for his comrade in misery, and collected enough money by sixpences to get the poet's clothes out of pawn. Two days afterwards Boyse had spent the money and was found in bed, covered only with a blanket, through two holes in which he passed his arms to write. Boyse, it appears, when still in this position would lay out his last half-guinea to buy truffles and mushrooms for his last scrap of beef. Of another scribbler Johnson said, "I honour Derrick for his strength of mind. One night when Floyd (another poor author)

was wandering about the streets at night, he found Derrick fast asleep upon a bulk. Upon being suddenly awaked, Derrick started up; 'My dear Floyd, I am sorry to see you in this destitute state; will you go home with me to my lodgings?' Authors in such circumstances might be forced into such a wonderful contract as that which is reported to have been drawn up by one Gardner with Rolt and Christopher Smart. They were to write a monthly miscellany, sold at sixpence, and to have a third of the profits; but they were to write nothing else, and the contract was to last for ninety-nine years. Johnson himself summed up the trade upon earth by the lines in which Virgil describes the entrance to hell; thus translated by Dryden:

Just in the gate and in the jaws of hell,  
Revengeful cares and sullen sorrows dwell.  
And pale diseases and repining age,  
Want, fear, and famine's unresisted rage;  
Here toils and Death and Death's half-brother, Sleep—  
Forms, terrible to view, their sentry keep.

"Now," said Johnson, "almost all these apply exactly to an author; these are the concomitants of a printing-house."

Judicious authors, indeed, were learning how to make literature pay. Some of them belonged to the class who understood the great truth that the scissors are a very superior implement to the pen considered as a tool of literary trade. Such, for example, was that respectable Dr. John Campbell, whose parties Johnson ceased to frequent lest Scotchmen should say of any good bits of work, "Ay, ay, he has learnt this of Cawmell." Campbell, he said quaintly, was a good man, a pious man. "I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows he has good principles,"—of which in fact there seems to be some less questionable evidence. Campbell supported himself by writings chiefly of the *Encyclopedia* or *Gazetteer* kind; and became, still in Johnson's phrase, "the richest author that ever grazed the common of literature." A more singular and less reputable character was that impudent quack, Sir John Hill, who, with his insolent attacks upon the Royal Society, pretentious botanical and medical compilations, plays, novels, and magazine articles, has long sunk into utter oblivion. It is said of him that he pursued every branch of literary quackery with greater contempt of character than any man of his time, and that he made as much as £1500 in a year—three times as much, it is added, as any one writer ever made in the same period.

The political scribblers—the Arnalls, Gordons, Trenchards, Guthries, Ralphs, and Amhersts, whose names meet us in the notes to the *Dunciad* and in contemporary pamphlets and newspapers—form another variety of the class. Their general character may be esti-



mated from Johnson's classification of the "Scribbler for a Party" with the "Commissioner of Excise," as the "two lowest of all human beings." "Ralph," says one of the notes to the *Dunciad*, "ended in the common sink of all such writers—a political newspaper." The prejudice against such employment has scarcely died out in our own day, and may be still traced in the account of Pendennis and his friend Warrington. People who do dirty work must be paid for it; and the Secret Committee, which inquired into Walpole's administration, reported that in ten years, from 1731 to 1741, a sum of £50,077 18s. had been paid to writers and printers of newspapers. Arnall, now remembered chiefly by Pope's line,—

Spirit of Arnall, aid me whilst I lie !

had received, in four years, £10,997 6s. 8d. of this amount. The more successful writers might look to pensions or preferment. Francis, for example, the translator of Horace, and the father, in all probability, of the most formidable of the whole tribe of such literary gladiators, received, it is said, 900*l.* a year for his work, besides being appointed to a rectory and the chaplaincy of Chelsea.

It must, moreover, be observed that the price of literary work was rising during the century, and that, in the latter half, considerable sums were received by successful writers. Religious as well as dramatic literature had begun to be commercially valuable. Baxter, in the previous century, made from 60*l.* to 80*l.* a year by his pen. The copyright of Tillotson's *Sermons* was sold, it is said, upon his death, for £2500. Considerable sums were made by the plan of publishing by subscription. It is said that 4600 people subscribed to the two posthumous volumes of Conybeare's *Sermons*. A few poets trod in Pope's steps. Young made more than £3000 for the Satires called the *Universal Passion*, published, I think, on the same plan; and the Duke of Wharton is said, though the report is doubtful, to have given him £2000 for the same work. Gay made £1000 by his *Poems*; £400 for the copyright of the *Beggars' Opera*, and three times as much for its second part, *Polly*. Among historians, Hume seems to have received £700 a volume; Smollett made £2000 by his catch-penny rival publication; Henry made £3300 by his history; and Robertson, after the booksellers had made £6000 by his *History of Scotland*, sold his *Charles V.* for £4500. Amongst the novelists, Fielding received £700 for *Tom Jones*, and £1000 for *Amelia*; Sterne, for the second edition of the first part of *Tristram Shandy*, and for two additional volumes, received £650; besides which Lord Fauconberg gave him a living (most inappropriate acknowledgment, one would say!), and Warburton a purse of gold. Goldsmith received 60 guineas for the immortal *Vicar*, a fair price, according to Johnson, for a work by a then unknown author. By each of his plays he made

about £500, and for the eight volumes of his *Natural History* he received 800 guineas. Towards the end of the century, Mrs. Radcliffe got £500 for the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and £800 for her last work, the *Italian*. Perhaps the largest sum given for a single book was £6000 paid to Hawkesworth for his account of the South Sea Expeditions. Horne Took received from £4000 to £5000 for the *Diversions of Purley*; and it is added by his biographer, though it seems to be incredible, that Hayley received no less than £11,000 for the *Life of Cowper*. This was, of course, in the present century, when we are already approaching the period of Scott and Byron.

Such sums prove that some few authors might achieve independence by a successful work; and it is well to remember them in considering Johnson's life from the business point of view. Though he never grumbled at the booksellers, and on the contrary was always ready to defend them as liberal men, he certainly failed, whether from carelessness or want of skill, to turn them to as much profit as many less celebrated rivals. Meanwhile, pecuniary success of this kind was beyond any reasonable hopes. A man who has to work like his own dependent Levett, and to make the "modest toil of every day" supply "the wants of every day," must discount his talents until he can secure leisure for some more sustained effort. Johnson, coming up from the country to seek for work, could have but a slender prospect of rising above the ordinary level of his Grub Street companions and rivals. One publisher to whom he applied suggested to him that it would be his wisest course to buy a porter's knot and carry trunks; and, in the struggle which followed, Johnson must sometimes have been tempted to regret that the advice was not taken.

The details of the ordeal through which he was now to pass have naturally vanished. Johnson, long afterwards, burst into tears on recalling the trials of this period. But, at the time, no one was interested in noting the history of an obscure literary drudge, and it has not been described by the sufferer himself. What we know is derived from a few letters and incidental references of Johnson in later days. On first arriving in London he was almost destitute, and had to join with Garrick in raising a loan of five pounds, which, we are glad to say, was repaid. He dined for eightpence at an ordinary: a cut of meat for sixpence, bread for a penny, and a penny to the waiter, making out the charge. One of his acquaintance had told him that a man might live in London for thirty pounds a year. Ten pounds would pay for clothes; a garret might be hired for eighteen-pence a week, if any one asked for an address, it was easy to reply, "I am to be found at such a place." Threepence laid out at a coffee-house would enable him to pass some hours a day in good company; dinner might be had for sixpence, a bread-and-milk breakfast for a penny, and supper was superfluous. On clean-shirt day you might go abroad and pay visits. This leaves a surplus of nearly one pound from the thirty.

Johnson, however, had a wife to support ; and to raise funds for even so ascetic a mode of existence required steady labour. Often, it seems, his purse was at the very lowest ebb. One of his letters to his employer is signed *impransus* ; and whether or not the dinnerless condition was in this case accidental, or significant of absolute impecuniosity, the less pleasant interpretation is not improbable. He would walk the streets all night with his friend Savage, when their combined funds could not pay for a lodging. One night, as he told Sir Joshua Reynolds in later years, they thus perambulated St. James's Square, warming themselves by declaiming against Walpole, and nobly resolved that they would stand by their country.

Patriotic enthusiasm, however, as no one knew better than Johnson, is a poor substitute for bed and supper. Johnson suffered acutely and made some attempts to escape from his misery. To the end of his life, he was grateful to those who had lent him a helping hand. "Harry Hervey," he said of one of them shortly before his death, "was a vicious man, but very kind to me. If you call a dog Hervey, I shall love him." Pope was impressed by the excellence of his first poem, *London*, and induced Lord Gower to write to a friend to beg Swift to obtain a degree for Johnson from the University of Dublin. The terms of this circuitous application, curious, as bringing into connexion three of the most eminent men of letters of the day, prove that the youngest of them was at the time (1739) in deep distress. The object of the degree was to qualify Johnson for a mastership of £60 a year, which would make him happy for life. He would rather, said Lord Gower, die upon the road to Dublin if an examination were necessary, "than be starved to death in translating for booksellers, which has been his only subsistence for some time past." The application failed, however, and the want of a degree was equally fatal to another application to be admitted to practise at Doctor's Commons.

Literature was thus perforce Johnson's sole support ; and by literature was meant, for the most part, drudgery of the kind indicated by the phrase, "translating for booksellers." While still in Lichfield, Johnson had, as I have said, written to Cave, proposing to become a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The letter was one of those which a modern editor receives by the dozen, and answers as perfunctorily as his conscience will allow. It seems, however, to have made some impression upon Cave, and possibly led to Johnson's employment by him on his first arrival in London. From 1738 he was employed both on the Magazine and in some jobs of translation.

Edward Cave, to whom we are thus introduced, was a man of some mark in the history of literature. Johnson always spoke of him with affection and afterwards wrote his life in complimentary terms. Cave, though a clumsy, phlegmatic person of little cultivation, seems to have been one of those men who, whilst destitute of real critical powers, have a certain instinct for recognizing the commercial value of literary



wares. He had become by this time well-known as the publisher of a magazine which survives to this day. Journals containing summaries of passing events had already been started. Boyer's *Political State of Great Britain* began in 1711. *The Historical Register*, which added to a chronicle some literary notices, was started in 1716. *The Grub Street Journal* was another journal with fuller critical notices, which first appeared in 1730; and these two seem to have been superseded by the *Gentleman's Magazine*, started by Cave in the next year. Johnson saw in it an opening for the employment of his literary talents; and regarded its contributions with that awe so natural in youthful aspirants, and at once so comic and pathetic to writers of a little experience. The names of many of Cave's staff are preserved in a note to Hawkins. One or two of them, such as Birch and Akenside, have still a certain interest for students of literature; but few have heard of the great Moses Browne, who was regarded as the great poetical light of the magazine. Johnson looked up to him as a leader in his craft, and was graciously taken by Cave to an alehouse in Clerkenwell, where, wrapped in a horseman's coat, and "a great bushy uncombed wig," he saw Mr. Browne sitting at the end of a long table, in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and felt the satisfaction of a true hero-worshipper.

It is needless to describe in detail the literary task-work done by Johnson at this period, the Latin poems which he contributed in praise of Cave, and of Cave's friends, or the Jacobite squibs by which he relieved his anti-ministerialist feelings. One incident of the period doubtless refreshed the soul of many authors, who have shared Campbell's gratitude to Napoleon for the sole redeeming action of his life—the shooting of a bookseller. Johnson was employed by Osborne, a rough specimen of the trade, to make a catalogue of the Harleian Library. Osborne offensively reproved him for negligence, and Johnson knocked him down with a folio. The book with which the feat was performed (*Biblia Græca Septuaginta*, fol, 1594, Frankfort) was in existence in a bookseller's shop at Cambridge in 1812, and should surely have been placed in some safe author's museum.

The most remarkable of Johnson's performances as a hack writer deserves a brief notice. He was one of the first of reporters. Cave published such reports of the debates in Parliament as were then allowed by the jealousy of the Legislature, under the title of *The Senate of Lilliput*. Johnson was the author of the debates from November, 1740, to February, 1742. Persons were employed to attend in the two Houses, who brought home notes of the speeches, which were then put into shape by Johnson. Long afterwards, at a dinner at Foote's, Francis (the father of Junius) mentioned a speech of Pitt's as the best he had ever read, and superior to anything in Demosthenes. Hereupon Johnson replied, "I wrote that speech in a garret in Exeter Street." When the company applauded not only his eloquence but his impartiality Johnson replied, "That is not quite true; I saved appearances toler-

ably well, but I took care that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it." The speeches passed for a time as accurate; though, in truth, it has been proved and it is easy to observe, that they are in fact very vague reflections of the original. The editors of *Chesterfield's Works* published two of the speeches, and to Johnson's considerable amusement, declared that one of them resembled Demosthenes and the other Cicero. It is plain enough to the modern reader that, if so, both of the ancient orators must have written true Johnsonese; and, in fact, the style of the true author is often as plainly marked in many of these compositions as in the *Rambler* or *Rasselas*. For this deception, such as it was, Johnson expressed penitence at the end of his life, though he said that he had ceased to write when he found that they were taken as genuine. He would not be "accessory to the propagation of falsehood."

Another of Johnson's works, which appeared in 1744, requires notice both for its intrinsic merit and its auto-biographical interest. The most remarkable of his Grub Street companions was the Richard Savage already mentioned. Johnson's life of him, written soon after his death, is one of his most forcible performances, and the best extant illustration of the life of the struggling authors of the time. Savage claimed to be the illegitimate son of the Countess of Macclesfield, who was divorced from her husband in the year of his birth on account of her connexion with his supposed father, Lord Rivers. According to the story, believed by Johnson, and published without her contradiction in the mother's lifetime, she not only disavowed her son, but cherished an unnatural hatred for him. She told his father that he was dead, in order that he might not be benefitted by the father's will; she tried to have him kidnapped and sent to the plantations; and she did her best to prevent him from receiving a pardon when he had been sentenced to death for killing a man in a tavern brawl. However this may be, and there are reasons for doubt, the story was generally believed, and caused much sympathy for the supposed victim. Savage was at one time protected by the kindness of Steele, who published his story, and sometimes employed him as a literary assistant. When Steele became disgusted with him, he received generous help from the actor Wilks and from Mrs. Oldfield, to whom he had been introduced by some dramatic efforts. Then he was taken up by Lord Tyrconnel, but abandoned by him after a violent quarrel; he afterwards called himself a volunteer laureate, and received a pension of £50 a year from Queen Caroline; on her death he was thrown into deep distress, and helped by a subscription to which Pope was the chief contributor, on condition of retiring to the country. Ultimately he quarrelled with his last protectors, and ended by dying in a debtor's prison. Various poetical works, now utterly forgotten, obtained for him scanty profit. This career sufficiently reveals the character. Savage belonged to the very common

type of men who seem to employ their whole talents to throw away their chances in life, and to disgust every one who offers them a helping hand. He was, however, a man of some talent, though his poems are now hopelessly unreadable, and seems to have had a singular attraction for Johnson. The biography is curiously marked by Johnson's constant effort to put the best face upon faults which he has too much love of truth to conceal. The explanation is, partly, that Johnson conceived himself to be avenging a victim of cruel oppression. "This mother," he says, after recording her vindictiveness, "is still alive, and may perhaps even yet, though her malice was often defeated, enjoy the pleasure of reflecting that the life which she often endeavoured to destroy was at last shortened by her maternal offices: that though she could not transport her son to the plantations, bury him in the shop of a mechanic, or hasten the hand of the public executioner, she has yet had the satisfaction of embittering all his hours, and forcing him into exigencies that hurried on his death.

But it is also probable that Savage had a strong influence upon Jonson's mind at a very impressible part of his career. The young man, still ignorant of life and full of reverent enthusiasm for the literary magnates of his time, was impressed by the varied experience of his companion, and, it may be, flattered by his intimacy. Savage, he says admiringly, had enjoyed great opportunities of seeing the most conspicuous men of the day in their private life. He was shrewd and inquisitive enough to use his opportunities well. "More circumstances to constitute a critic on human life could not easily concur." The only phrase which survives to justify this remark is Savage's statement about Walpole, that "the whole range of his mind was from obscenity to politics, and from politics to obscenity." We may, however, guess what was the special charm of the intercourse to Johnson. Savage was an expert in that science of human nature, learnt from experience not from books, upon which Johnson set so high a value, and of which he was destined to become the authorized expositor. There were, moreover, resemblances between the two men. They were both admired and sought out for their conversational powers. Savage, indeed, seems to have lived chiefly by the people who entertained him for talk, till he had disgusted them by his insolence and his utter disregard of time and propriety. He would, like Johnson, sit up talking beyond midnight, and next day decline to rise till dinner time, though his favourite drink was not, like Johnson's, free from intoxicating properties. Both of them had a lofty pride, which Johnson heartily commends in Savage, though he has difficulty in palliating some of its manifestations. One of the stories reminds us of an anecdote already related of Johnson himself. Some clothes had been left for Savage at a coffee-house by a person who, out of delicacy, concealed his name. Savage, however, resented



some want of ceremony, and refused to enter the house again till the clothes had been removed.

What was honourable pride in Johnson was, indeed, simple arrogance in Savage. He asked favours, his biographer says, without submission, and resented refusal as an insult. He had too much pride to acknowledge, not too much to receive, obligations; enough to quarrel with his charitable benefactors, but not enough to make him rise to independence of their charity. His pension would have sufficed to keep him, only that as soon as he received it he retired from the sight of all his acquaintance, and came back before long as penniless as before. This conduct, observes his biographer, was "very particular." It was hardly so singular as objectionable, and we are not surprised to be told that he was rather a "friend of goodness" than himself a good man. In short, we may say of him as Beauclerc said of a friend of Boswell's, that, if he had excellent principles, he did not wear them out in practice.

There is something quaint about this picture of a thorough-paced scamp, admirably painted by a virtuous man; forced, in spite of himself, to make it a likeness, and striving in vain to make it attractive. But it is also pathetic when we remember that Johnson shared some part at least of his hero's miseries. "On a bunk, in a cellar, or in a glass-house, among thieves and beggars, was to be found the author of *The Wanderer*, the man of exalted sentiments, extensive views, and curious observations; the man whose remarks on life might have assisted the statesman, whose ideas of virtue might have enlightened the moralist, whose eloquence might have influenced senators, and whose delicacy might have polished Courts." Very shocking, no doubt, and yet hardly surprising under the circumstances! To us it is more interesting to remember that the author of the *Rambler* was not only a sympathizer, but a fellow-sufferer with the author of the *Wanderer*, and shared the queer "lodgings" of his friend, as Floyd shared the lodgings of Derrick. Johnson happily came unscathed through the ordeal which was too much for poor Savage, and could boast with perfect truth in later life that "no man, who ever lived by literature, had lived more independently than I have done." It was in so strange a school and under such questionable teaching, that Johnson formed his character of the world and of the conduct befitting its inmates. One characteristic conclusion is indicated in the opening passage of the life. It has always been observed, he says, that men eminent by nature or fortune are not generally happy: "whether it be that apparent superiority incites great designs, and great designs are naturally liable to fatal miscarriages, or that the general lot of mankind is misery, and the misfortunes of those whose eminence drew upon them an universal attention have been more carefully recorded because they were more generally observed, and have in reality been only more conspicuous than those of others, not more frequent or more severe."

The last explanation was that which really commended itself to Johnson. Nobody had better reason to know that obscurity might conceal a misery as bitter as any that fell to the lot of the most eminent. The gloom due to his constitutional temperament was intensified by the sense that he and his wife were dependent upon the goodwill of a narrow and ignorant tradesman for the scantiest maintenance. How was he to reach some solid standing-ground above the hopeless mire of Grub Street? As a journeyman author he could make both ends meet, but only on condition of incessant labour. Illness and misfortune would mean constant dependence upon charity or bondage to creditors. To get ahead of the world it was necessary to distinguish himself in some way from the herd of needy competitors. He had come up from Lichfield with a play in his pocket, but the play did not seem at present to have much chance of emerging. Meanwhile he published a poem which did something to give him a general reputation.

*London*—an imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal—was published in May, 1738. The plan was doubtless suggested by Pope's imitations of Horace, which had recently appeared. Though necessarily following the lines of Juvenal's poem, and conforming to the conventional fashion of the time, both in sentiment and versification, the poem has a biographical significance. It is indeed odd to find Johnson, who afterwards thought of *London* as a lover of his mistress, and who despised nothing more heartily than the cant of Rousseau and the sentimentalists, adopting in this poem the ordinary denunciations of the corruption of towns, and singing the praises of an innocent country life. Doubtless, the young writer was like other young men, taking up a strain still imitative and artificial. He has a quiet smile at Savage in the life, because in his retreat to Wales, that enthusiast declared that "he could not debar himself from the happiness which was to be found in the calm of a cottage, or lose the opportunity of listening without intermission to the melody of the nightingale, which he believed was to be heard from every bramble, and which he did not fail to mention as a very important part of the happiness of a country life." In *London*, this insincere cockney adopts Savage's view. Thales, who is generally supposed to represent Savage (and this coincidence seems to confirm the opinion), is to retire "from the dungeons of the Strand," and to end a healthy life in pruning walks and twining bowers in his garden.

There every bush with nature's music rings,  
There every breeze bears health upon its wings.

Johnson had not yet learnt the value of perfect sincerity even in poetry. But it must also be admitted that *London*, as seen by the poor drudge from a Grub Street garret, probably presented a prospect gloomy enough to make even Johnson long at times for rural solitude.

The poem reflects, too, the ordinary talk of the heterogeneous band of patriots, Jacobites, and disappointed Whigs, who were beginning to gather enough strength to threaten Walpole's long tenure of power. Many references to contemporary politics illustrate Johnson's sympathy with the inhabitants of the contemporary Cave of Adullam.

This poem, as already stated, attracted Pope's notice, who made a curious note on a scrap of paper sent with it to a friend. Johnson is described as "a man afflicted with an infirmity of the convulsive kind, that attacks him sometimes so as to make him a sad spectacle." This seems to have been the chief information obtained by Pope about the anonymous author, of whom he had said, on first reading the poem, this man will soon be *déterré*. *London* made a certain noise; it reached a second edition in a week, and attracted various patrons, among others General Oglethorpe, celebrated by Pope, and through a long life the warm friend of Johnson. One line, however, in the poem printed in capital letters, gives the moral which was doubtless most deeply felt by the author, and which did not lose its meaning in the years to come. This mournful truth, he says,—

Is everywhere confess'd,  
Slow rises worth by poverty depress'd.

Ten years later (in January, 1749), appeared the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, an imitation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal. The difference in tone shows how deeply this and similar truths had been impressed upon its author in the interval. Though still an imitation, it is as significant as the most original work could be of Johnson's settled views of life. It was written at a white heat, as indeed Johnson wrote all his best work. Its strong Stoical morality, its profound and melancholy illustrations of the old and ever new sentiment, *Vanitas Vanitatum*, make it perhaps the most impressive poem of the kind in the language. The lines on the scholar's fate showed that the iron had entered his soul in the interval. Should the scholar succeed beyond expectation in his labours and escape melancholy and disease, yet, he says,—

Yet hope not life from grief and danger free,  
Nor think the doom of man reversed on thee;  
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes  
And pause awhile from letters, to be wise;  
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail;  
See nations, slowly wise and meanly just,  
To buried merit raise the tardy bust,  
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend.  
Hear Lydiat's life and Galileo's end.

For the "patron," Johnson had originally written the "garret." The change was made after an experience of patronage to be presently described in connexion with the *Dictionary*.



For *London* Johnson received ten guineas, and for the *Vanity of Human Wishes* fifteen. Though indirectly valuable, as increasing his reputation, such work was not very profitable. The most promising career in a pecuniary sense was still to be found on the stage. Novelists were not yet the rivals of dramatists, and many authors had made enough by a successful play to float them through a year or two. Johnson had probably been determined by his knowledge of this fact to write the tragedy of *Irene*. No other excuse at least can be given for the composition of one of the heaviest and most unreadable of dramatic performances, interesting now, if interesting at all, solely as a curious example of the result of bestowing great powers upon a totally uncongenial task. Young men, however, may be pardoned for such blunders if they are not repeated, and Johnson, though he seems to have retained a fondness for his unlucky performance, never indulged in playwriting after leaving Lichfield. The best thing connected with the play was Johnson's retort to his friend Walmsley, the Lichfield registrar. "How," asked Walmsley, "can you contrive to plunge your heroine into deeper calamity?" "Sir," said Johnson, "I can put her into the spiritual court." Even Boswell can only say for *Irene* that it is entitled to the praise of superior excellence," and admits its entire absence of dramatic power. Garrick, who had become manager of Drury Lane, produced his friend's work in 1749. The play was carried through nine nights by Garrick's friendly zeal, so that the author had his three nights' profits. For this he received £195 17s. and for the copy he had £100. People probably attended, as they attend modern representations of legitimate drama, rather from a sense of duty than in the hope of pleasure. The heroine originally had to speak two lines with a bowstring round her neck. The situation produced cries of murder, and she had to go off the stage alive. The objectionable passage was removed, but *Irene* was on the whole a failure, and has never, I imagine, made another appearance. When asked how he felt upon his ill-success, he replied "like the monument," and indeed he made it a principle throughout life to accept the decision of the public like a sensible man without murmurs.

Meanwhile, Johnson was already embarked upon an undertaking of a very different kind. In 1747 he had put forth a plan for an English Dictionary, addressed, at the suggestion of Dodsley, to Lord Chesterfield, then Secretary of State, and the great contemporary Mæcenas. Johnson had apparently been maturing the scheme for some time. "I know," he says in the "plan," that "the work in which I engaged is generally considered as drudgery for the blind, as the proper toil of artless industry, a book that requires neither the light of learning nor the activity of genius, but may be successfully performed without any higher quality than that of bearing burdens with dull patience, and beating the track of the alphabet with sluggish resolution." He adds in a sub-sarcastic tone, that although

princes and statesmen had once thought it honourable to patronize dictionaries, he had considered such benevolent acts to be "prodigies, recorded rather to raise wonder than expectation," and he was accordingly pleased and surprised to find that Chesterfield took an interest in his undertaking. He proceeds to lay down the general principles upon which he intends to frame his work, in order to invite timely suggestions and repress unreasonable expectations. At this time, humble as his aspirations might be, he took a view of the possibilities open to him which had to be lowered before the publication of the dictionary. He shared the illusion that a language might be "fixed" by making a catalogue of its words. In the preface which appeared with the completed work, he explains very sensibly the vanity of any such expectation. Whilst all human affairs are changing, it is, as he says, absurd to imagine that the language which repeats all human thoughts and feelings can remain unaltered.

A dictionary, as Johnson conceived it, was in fact work for a "harmless drudge," the definition of a lexicographer given in the book itself. Etymology in a scientific sense was as yet non-existent, and Johnson was not in this respect ahead of his contemporaries. To collect all the words in the language, to define their meanings as accurately as might be, to give the obvious or whimsical guesses at Etymology suggested by previous writers, and to append a good collection of illustrative passages was the sum of his ambition. Any systematic training of the historical processes by which a particular language had been developed was unknown, and of course the result could not be anticipated. The work, indeed, required a keen logical faculty of definition, and wide reading of the English literature of the two preceding centuries; but it could of course give no play either for the higher literary faculties on points of scientific investigation. A dictionary in Johnson's sense was the highest kind of work to which a literary journeyman could be set, but it was still work for a journeyman, not for an artist. He was not adding to literature, but providing a useful implement for future men of letters.

Johnson had thus got on hand the biggest job that could be well undertaken by a good workman in his humble craft. He was to receive fifteen hundred and seventy-five pounds for the whole, and he expected to finish it in three years. The money, it is to be observed, was to satisfy not only Johnson, but several copyists employed in the mechanical part of the work. It was advanced by instalments, and came to an end before the conclusion of the book. Indeed, it appeared when accounts were settled, that he had received a hundred pounds more than was due. He could, however, pay his way for the time, and would gain a reputation enough to ensure work in future. The period of extreme poverty had probably ended when Johnson got permanent employment on the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He was not elevated above the need of drudgery and economy, but he might

at least be free from the dread of neglect. He could command his market—such as it was. The necessity of steady labour was probably unfelt in repelling his fits of melancholy. His name was beginning to be known, and men of reputation were seeking his acquaintance. In the winter of 1749 he formed a club, which met weekly at a “famous beef-steak house” in Ivy Lane. Among its members were Hawkins, afterwards his biographer, and two friends—Bathurst, a physician, and Hawkesworth, an author—for the first of whom he entertained an unusually strong affection. The Club, like its more famous successor, gave Johnson an opportunity of displaying and improving his great conversational powers. He was already dreaded for his prowess in argument, his dictatorial manners and vivid flashes of wit and humour, the more effective from the habitual gloom and apparent heaviness of the discourses.

The talk of this society probably suggested topics for the *Rambler*, which appeared at this time, and caused Johnson's fame to spread further beyond the literary circles of London. The wit and humour have, indeed, left few traces upon its ponderous pages, for the *Rambler* marks the culminating period of Johnson's worst qualities of style. The pompous and involved language seems indeed to be a fit clothing for the melancholy reflections which are its chief staple, and in spite of its unmistakable power it is as heavy reading as the heavy class of lay-sermonizing to which it belongs. Such literature, however, is often strangely popular in England, and the *Rambler*, though its circulation was limited, gave to Johnson his position as a great practical moralist. He took his literary title, one may say, from the *Rambler*, as the more familiar title was derived from the *Dictionary*.

The *Rambler* was published twice a week from March 20th, 1750, to March 14th, 1752. In five numbers alone he received assistance from friends, and one of these, written by Richardson, is said to have been the only number which had a large sale. The circulation rarely exceeded 500, though ten English editions were published in the author's lifetime, besides Scotch and Irish editions. The payment, however, namely, two guineas a number, must have been welcome to Johnson, and the friendship of many distinguished men of the time was a still more valuable reward. A quaint story illustrates the hero-worship of which Johnson now became the object. Dr. Burney, afterwards an intimate friend, had introduced himself to Johnson by letter in consequence of the *Rambler*, and the plan of the *Dictionary*. The admiration was shared by a friend of Burney's, a Mr. Bewley, known—in Norfolk at least—as the “philosopher of Massingham.” When Burney at last gained the honour of a personal interview, he wished to procure some “relic” of Johnson for his friend. He cut off some bristles from a hearth-broom in the doctor's chambers, and sent them in a letter to his fellow-enthusiast. Long afterwards Johnson was pleased to hear of this simple-minded homage, and not only



sent a copy of the *Lives of the Poets* to the rural philosopher, but deigned to grant him a personal interview.

Dearer than any such praise was the approval of Johnson's wife. She told him that, well as she had thought of him before, she had not considered him equal to such a performance. The voice that so charmed him was soon to be silenced for ever. Mrs. Johnson died (March 17th, 1752) three days after the appearance of the last *Rambler*. The man who has passed through such a trial knows well that, whatever may be in store for him in the dark future, fate can have no heavier blow in reserve. Though Johnson once acknowledged to Boswell, when in a placid humour, that happier days had come to him in his old age than in his early life, he would probably have added that though fame and friendship and freedom from the harrowing cares of poverty might cause his life to be more equably happy, yet their rewards could represent but a faint and mocking reflection of the best moments of a happy marriage. His strong mind and tender nature reeled under the blow. Here is one pathetic little note written to the friend, Dr. Taylor, who had come to him in his distress. That which first announced the calamity, and which, said Taylor, "expressed grief in the strongest manner he had ever read," is lost.

"Dear Sir,—Let me have your company and instruction. Do not live away from me. My distress is great.

"Pray desire Mrs. Taylor to inform me what mourning I should buy for my mother and Miss Porter, and bring a note in writing with you.

"Remember me in your prayers, for vain is the help of man.

"I am, dear sir,

"SAM. JOHNSON."

We need not regret that a veil is drawn over the details of the bitter agony of his passage through the valley of the shadow of death. It is enough to put down the wails which he wrote long afterwards when visibly approaching the close of all human emotions and interests:—

"This is the day on which, in 1752, dear Letty died. I have now uttered a prayer of repentance and contrition; perhaps Letty knows that I prayed for her. Perhaps Letty is now praying for me. God help me. Thou, God, art merciful, hear my prayers and enable me to trust in Thee.

"We were married almost seventeen years, and have now been parted thirty."

It seems half profane, even at this distance of time, to pry into grief so deep and so lasting. Johnson turned for relief to that which all sufferers know to be the only remedy for sorrow—hard labour. He set to work in his garret, an inconvenient room, "because," he said, "in that room only I never saw Mrs. Johnson." He helped his friend Hawkesworth in the *Adventurer*, a new periodical of the *Rambler* kind; but his main work was the *Dictionary*, which came out at last in 1755. Its appearance was the occasion of an explosion of wrath

which marks an epoch in our literature. Johnson, as we have seen, had dedicated the Plan to Lord Chesterfield ; and his language implies that they had been to some extent in personal communication. Chesterfield's fame is in curious antithesis to Johnson's. He was a man of great abilities, and seems to have deserved high credit for some parts of his statesmanship. As a Viceroy in Ireland in particular he showed qualities rare in his generation. To Johnson he was known as the nobleman who had a wide social influence as an acknowledged *arbiter elegantiarum*, and who reckoned among his claims some of that literary polish in which the earlier generation of nobles had certainly been superior to their successors. The art of life expounded in his *Letters* differs from Johnson as much as the elegant diplomatist differs from the rough intellectual gladiator of Grub Street. Johnson spoke his mind of his rival without reserve. "I thought," he said, "that this man had been a Lord among wits ; but I find that he is only a wit among Lords." And of the *Letters* he said more keenly that they taught the morals of a harlot and the manners of a dancing-master. Chesterfield's opinion of Johnson is indicated by the description in his *Letters* of a "respectable Hottentot, who throws his meat anywhere but down his throat. This absurd person," said Chesterfield, "was not only uncouth in manners and warm in dispute, but behaved exactly in the same way to superiors, equals, and inferiors ; and therefore, by a necessary consequence, absurdly to two of the three. *Hinc illæ lacrymæ!*"

Johnson, in my opinion, was not far wrong in his judgment, though it would be a gross injustice to regard Chesterfield as nothing but a fribble. But men representing two such antithetic types were not likely to admire each other's good qualities. Whatever had been the intercourse between them, Johnson was naturally annoyed when the dignified noble published two articles in the *World*—a periodical supported by such polite personages as himself and Horace Walpole—in which the need of a dictionary was set forth, and various courtly compliments described Johnson's fitness for a dictatorship over the language. Nothing could be more prettily turned ; but it meant, and Johnson took it to mean, I should like to have the dictionary dedicated to me : such a compliment would add a feather to my cap, and enable me to appear to the world as a patron of literature as well as an authority upon manners. "After making great professions," as Johnson said, "he had, for many years, taken no notice of me ; but when my *Dictionary* was coming out, he fell a scribbling in the *World* about it." Johnson therefore bestowed upon the noble earl a piece of his mind in a letter which was not published till it came out in Boswell's biography

"My Lord,—I have been lately informed by the proprietor of the *World* that two papers, in which my *Dictionary* is recommended to the public, were written by your lordship. To be so distinguished is an honour which, being very little accus-

tomed to favours from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

"When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address; and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself, *le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending: but I found my attendance so little encouraged that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the arts of pleasing which a wearied and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

"Seven years, my Lord, have now passed, since I waited in your outward rooms and was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before.

"The shepherd in *Virgil* grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.

"Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

"Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, should less be possible, with less; for I have been long wakened from that dream of hope in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, my Lord,

"Your Lordship's most humble, most obedient servant,

"SAM. JOHNSON."

The letter is one of those knock-down blows to which no answer is possible, and upon which comment is superfluous. It was, as Mr. Carlyle calls it, "the far-famed blast of doom proclaiming into the ear of Lord Chesterfield, and through him of the listening world, that patronage should be no more."

That is all that can be said; yet perhaps it should be added that Johnson remarked that he had once received £10 from Chesterfield, though he thought the assistance too inconsiderable to be mentioned in such a letter. Hawkins also states that Chesterfield sent overtures to Johnson through two friends, one of whom, long Sir Thomas Robinson, stated that, if he were rich enough (a judicious clause) he would himself settle £500 a year upon Johnson. Johnson replied that if the first peer of the realm made such an offer, he would show him the way downstairs. Hawkins is startled at this insolence, and at Johnson's uniform assertion that an offer of money was an insult. We cannot tell what was the history of the £10; but Johnson, in spite of Hawkins's righteous indignation, was in fact too proud to be a beggar, and owed to his pride his escape from the fate of Savage.

The appearance of the *Dictionary* placed Johnson in the position described soon afterwards by Smollett. He was henceforth "the



great Cham of Literature"—a monarch sitting in the chair previously occupied by his namesake, Ben, by Dryden and by Pope ; but which has since that time been vacant. The world of literature has become too large for such authority. Complaints were not seldom uttered at the time. Goldsmith has urged that Boswell wished to make a monarchy of what ought to be a republic. Goldsmith, who would have been the last man to find serious fault with the dictator, thought the dictatorship objectionable. Some time indeed was still to elapse before we can say Johnson was firmly seated on the throne ; but the *Dictionary* and the *Rambler* had given him a position not altogether easy to appreciate, now that the *Dictionary* had been superseded and the *Rambler* gone out of fashion. His name was the highest at this time (1755) in the ranks of pure literature. The fame of Warburton possibly bulked larger for the amount, and one of his flatterers was comparing him to the Colossus which bestrides the petty world of contemporaries. But Warburton had subsided into episcopal repose, and literature had been for him a stepping-stone rather than an ultimate aim. Hume had written works of far more enduring influence than Johnson ; but they were little read though generally abused, and scarcely belong to the purely literary history. The first volume of his *History of England* had appeared (1754), but had not succeeded. The second was just coming out. Richardson was still giving laws to his little seraglio of adoring women ; Fielding had died (1754), worn out by labour and dissipation ; Smollett was active in the literary trade, but not in such a way as to increase his own dignity or that of his employment ; Gray was slowly writing a few lines of exquisite verse in his retirement at Cambridge ; two young Irish adventurers, Burke and Goldsmith, were just coming to London to try their fortune ; Adam Smith made his first experiment as an author by reviewing the *Dictionary* in the *Edinburgh Review* ; Robertson had not yet appeared as a historian ; Gibbon was at Lausanne repenting of his old brief lapse into Catholicism as an act of undergraduate's folly ; and Cowper, after three years of "giggling and making giggle" with Thurlow in an attorney's office, was now entered at the Temple and amusing himself at times with literature in company with such small men of letters as Colman, Bonnell Thornton, and Lloyd. It was a slack tide of literature ; the generation of Pope had passed away and left no successors, and no writer of the time could be put in competition with the giant now known as "Dictionary Johnson."

When the last sheet of the *Dictionary* had been carried to the publisher, Millar, Johnson asked the messenger, "What did he say?" "Sir," said the messenger, "he said, 'Thank God I have done with him.'" "I am glad," replied Johnson, "that he thanks God for anything." Thankfulness for relief from seven years' toil seems to have been Johnson's predominant feeling ; and he was not

anxious for a time to take any new labours upon his shoulders. Some years passed which have left few traces either upon his personal or his literary history. He contributed a good many reviews in 1756-7 to the *Literary Magazine*, one of which, a review of Soame Jenyns, is amongst his best performances. To a weekly paper he contributed for two years, from April, 1758, to April, 1760, a set of essays called the *Idler*, on the old *Rambler* plan. He did some small literary cobbler's work, receiving a guinea for a prospectus to a newspaper and ten pounds for correcting a volume of poetry. He had advertised in 1756 a new edition of Shakspeare which was to appear by Christmas, 1757 : but he dawdled over it so unconscionably that it did not appear for nine years ; and then only in consequence of taunts from Churchill, who accused him with too much plausibility of cheating his subscribers.

He for subscribers baits his hook ;  
And takes your cash : but where's the book  
No matter where ; wise fear, you know,  
Forbids the robbing of a foe ;  
But what to serve our private ends  
Forbids the cheating of our friends ?

In truth, his constitutional indolence seems to have gained advantages over him, when the stimulus of a heavy task was removed. In his meditations, there are many complaints of his "sluggishness" and resolutions of amendment. "A kind of strange oblivion has spread over me," he says in April, 1764, "so that I know not what has become of the last years, and perceive that incidents and intelligence pass over me without leaving any impression."

It seems, however, that he was still frequently in difficulties. Letters are preserved showing that in the beginning of 1756 Richardson became surety for him for a debt, and lent him six guineas to release him from arrest. An event which happened three years later illustrates his position and character. In January, 1759, his mother died at the age of ninety. Johnson was unable to come to Lichfield, and some deeply pathetic letters to her and her stepdaughter, who lived with her, record his emotions. Here is the last sad farewell upon the snapping of the most sacred of human ties.

"Dear Honoured Mother," he says in a letter enclosed to Lucy Porter, the stepdaughter, "neither your condition nor your character make it fit for me to say much. You have been the best mother, and I believe the best woman in the world. I thank you for your indulgence to me, and beg forgiveness of all that I have done ill, and of all that I have omitted to do well. God grant you His Holy Spirit, and receive you to everlasting happiness for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Lord Jesus receive your spirit. I am, dear, dear mother,

"Your dutiful son,

"SAMUEL JOHNSON,"

Johnson managed to raise twelve guineas, six of them borrowed from his printer, to send to his dying mother. In order to gain money for her funeral expenses and some small debts, he wrote the story of *Rasselas*. It was composed in the evenings of a single week, and sent to press as it was written. He received £100 for this, perhaps the most successful of his minor writings, and £25 for a second edition. It was widely translated and universally admired. One of the strangest of literary coincidences is the contemporary appearance of this work and Voltaire's *Candide*; to which, indeed, it bears in some respects so strong a resemblance that, but for Johnson's apparent contradiction, we would suppose that he had at least heard some description of its design. The two stories, though widely differing in tone and style, are among the most powerful expressions of the melancholy produced in strong intellects by the sadness and sorrows of the world. The literary excellence of *Candide* has secured for it a wider and more enduring popularity than has fallen to the lot of Johnson's far heavier production. But *Rasselas* is a book of singular force, and bears the most characteristic impression of Johnson's peculiar temperament.

A great change was approaching in Johnson's circumstances. When George III. came to the throne, it struck some of his advisers that it would be well, as Boswell puts it, to open "a new and brighter prospect to men of literary merit." This commendable design was carried out by offering to Johnson a pension of three hundred a year. Considering that such men as Horace Walpole and his like were enjoying sinecures of more than twice as many thousands for being their father's sons, the bounty does not strike one as excessively liberal. It seems to have been really intended as some set-off against other pensions bestowed upon various hangers-on of the Scotch prime minister, Bute. Johnson was coupled with the contemptible scribbler, Shebbeare, who had lately been in the pillory for a Jacobite libel (a "he-bear" and a "she-bear," said the facetious newspapers), and when a few months afterwards a pension of £200 a year was given to the old actor, Sheridan, Johnson growled out that it was time for him to resign his own. Somebody kindly repeated the remark to Sheridan, who would never afterwards speak to Johnson.

The pension, though very welcome to Johnson, who seems to have been in real distress at the time, suggested some difficulty. Johnson had unluckily spoken of a pension in his *Dictionary* as "generally understood to mean pay given to a State hireling for treason to his country." He was assured, however, that he did not come within the definition; and that the reward was given for what he had done, not for anything that he was expected to do. After some hesitation, Johnson consented to accept the payment thus offered without the direct suggestion of any obligation, though it was probably calculated that he would in case of need be the more ready, as actually hap-



pened, to use his pen in defence of authority. He had not compromised his independence and might fairly laugh at angry comments. "I wish," he said afterwards, "that my pension were twice as large, that they might make twice as much noise." "I cannot now curse the House of Hanover," was his phrase on another occasion: "but I think that the pleasure of cursing the House of Hanover and drinking King James's health, all amply overbalanced by three hundred pounds a year." In truth, his Jacobitism was by this time, whatever it had once been, nothing more than a humorous crotchet, giving opportunity for the expression of Tory prejudice.

"I hope you will now purge and live cleanly like a gentleman," was Beauclerk's comment upon hearing of his friend's accession of fortune, and as Johnson is now emerging from Grub Street, it is desirable to consider what manner of man was to be presented to the wider circles that were opening to receive him.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### JOHNSON AND HIS FRIENDS.

It is not till some time after Johnson had come into the enjoyment of his pension, that we first see him through the eyes of competent observers. The Johnson of our knowledge, the most familiar figure to all students of English literary history, had already long passed the prime of life, and done the greatest part of his literary work. His character in the common phrase had been "formed" years before; as, indeed, people's characters are chiefly formed in the cradle; and not only his character, but the habits which are learnt in the great schoolroom of the world were fixed beyond any possibility of change. The strange eccentricities which had now become a second nature, amazed the society in which he was for over twenty years a prominent figure. Unsympathetic observers, those especially to whom the Chesterfield type represented the ideal of humanity, were simply disgusted or repelled. The man, they thought, might be in his place at a Grub Street pot-house; but had no business in a lady's drawing-room. If he had been modest and retiring, they might have put up with his defects; but Johnson was not a person whose qualities, good or bad, were of a kind to be ignored. Naturally enough, the fashionable world cared little for the rugged old giant. "The great," said Johnson, "had tried him and given him up; they had seen enough of him;" and his reason was pretty much to the purpose. "Great lords and great ladies don't love to have their mouths stopped," especially not, one may add, by an unwashed fist.

It is easy to blame them now. Everybody can see that a saint in beggar's rags is intrinsically better than a sinner in gold lace. But the principle is one of those which serves us for judging the dead, much more than for regulating our own conduct. Those, at any rate, may throw the first stone at the Horace Walpoles and Chesterfields who are quite certain that they would ask a modern Johnson to their houses. The trial would be severe. Poor Mrs. Boswell complained grievously of her husband's idolatry. "I have seen many a bear led by a man," she said; "but I never before saw a man led by a bear." The truth is, as Boswell explains, that the sage's uncouth habits, such as turning the candles' heads downwards to make them burn more brightly, and letting the wax drop upon the carpet, "could not but be disagreeable to a lady."

He had other habits still more annoying to people of delicate perceptions. A hearty despiser of all affectations, he despised especially the affectation of indifference to the pleasures of the table. "For my part," he said, "I mind my belly very studiously and very carefully, for I look upon it that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else." Avowing this principle he would innocently give himself the airs of a scientific epicure. "I, madam," he said to the terror of a lady with whom he was about to sup, "who live at a variety of good tables, am a much better judge of cookery than any person who has a very tolerable cook, but lives much at home, for his palate is gradually adapted to the taste of his cook, whereas, madam, in trying by a wider range, I can more exquisitely judge." But his pretensions to exquisite taste are by no means borne out by independent witnesses. "He laughs," said Tom Davies, "like a rhinoceros," and he seems to have eaten like a wolf—savagely, silently, and with indiscriminating fury. He was not a pleasant object during this performance. He was totally absorbed in the business of the moment, a strong perspiration came out, and the veins of his forehead swelled. He liked coarse satisfying dishes—boiled pork and veal-pie stuffed with plums and sugar; and in regard to wine, he seems to have accepted the doctrines of the critic of a certain fluid professing to be port, who asked, "What more can you want? It is black, and it is thick, and it makes you drunk." Claret, as Johnson put it, "is the liquor for boys, and port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy." He could, however, refrain, though he could not be moderate, and for all the latter part of his life, from 1766, he was a total abstainer. Nor, it should be added, does he ever appear to have sought for more than exhilaration from wine. His earliest intimate friend, Hector, said that he had never but once seen him drunk.

His appetite for more innocent kinds of food was equally excessive. He would eat seven or eight peaches before breakfast, and declared that he had only once in his life had as much wall-fruit as he wished.

His consumption of tea was prodigious, beyond all precedent. Hawkins quotes Bishop Burnet as having drunk sixteen large cups every morning, a feat which would entitle him to be reckoned as a rival. "A hardened and shameless tea-drinker," Johnson called himself, who "with tea amuses the evening, with tea solaces the midnights, and with tea welcomes the mornings." One of his teapots, preserved by a relic-hunter, contained two quarts, and he professed to have consumed five and twenty cups at a sitting. Poor Mrs. Thrale complains that he often kept her up making tea for him till four in the morning. His reluctance to go to bed was due to the fact that his nights were periods of intense misery; but the vast potations of tea can scarcely have tended to improve them.

The huge frame was clad in the raggedest of garments, until his acquaintance with the Thrales led to a partial reform. His wigs were generally burnt in front, from his shortsighted knack of reading with his head close to the candle; and at the Thrales, the butler stood ready to effect a change of wigs as he passed into the dining-room. Once or twice we have accounts of his bursting into unusual splendour. He appeared at the first representation of *Irene* in a scarlet waistcoat laced with gold; and on one of his first interviews with Goldsmith he took the trouble to array himself decently, because Goldsmith was reported to have justified slovenly habits by the precedent of the leader of his craft. Goldsmith, judging by certain famous suits, seems to have profited by the hint more than his preceptor. As a rule, Johnson's appearance, before he became a pensioner, was worthy of the proverbial manner of Grub Street. Beauclerc used to describe how he had once taken a French lady of distinction to see Johnson in his chambers. On descending the staircase they heard a noise like thunder. Johnson was pursuing them, struck by a sudden sense of the demands upon his gallantry. He brushed in between Beauclerc and the lady, and seizing her hand conducted her to her coach. A crowd of people collected to stare at the sage, dressed in rusty brown, with a pair of old shoes for slippers, a shrivelled wig on the top of his head, and with shirtsleeves and the knees of his breeches hanging loose. In those days, clergymen and physicians were only just abandoning the use of their official costume in the streets, and Johnson's slovenly habits were even more marked than they would be at present. "I have no passion for clean linen," he once remarked, and it is to be feared that he must sometimes have offended more senses than one.

In spite of his uncouth habits of dress and manners, Johnson claimed and, in a sense, with justice, to be a polite man. "I look upon myself," he said once to Boswell, "as a very polite man." He could show the stately courtesy of a sound Tory, who cordially accepts the principle of social distinction, but has far too strong a sense of self-respect to fancy that compliance with the ordinary conventions can possibly lower his own position. Rank of the spiritual kind was es-



pecially venerable to him. "I should as soon have thought of contradicting a bishop," was a phrase which marked the highest conceivable degree of deference to a man whom he respected. Nobody, again, could pay more effective compliments, when he pleased; and the many female friends who have written of him agree, that he could be singularly attractive to women. Women are, perhaps, more inclined than men to forgive external roughness in consideration of the great charm of deep tenderness in a thoroughly masculine nature. A characteristic phrase was his remark to Miss Monckton. She had declared, in opposition to one of Johnson's prejudices, that Sterne's writings were pathetic: "I am sure," she said, "they have affected me." "Why," said Johnson, smiling and rolling himself about, "that is because, dearest, you are a dunce!" When she mentioned this to him some time afterwards he replied: "Madam, if I had thought so, I certainly should not have said it." The truth could not be more neatly put.

Boswell notes, with some surprise, that when Johnson dined with Lord Monboddo he insisted upon rising when the ladies left the table, and took occasion to observe that politeness was "fictitious benevolence," and equally useful in common intercourse. Boswell's surprise seems to indicate that Scotchmen in those days were even greater bears than Johnson. He always insisted, as Miss Reynolds tells us, upon showing ladies to their carriages through Bolt Court, though his dress was such that her readers would, she thinks, be astonished that any man in his senses should have shown himself in it abroad or even at home. Another odd indication of Johnson's regard for good manners, so far as his lights would take him, was the extreme disgust with which he often referred to a certain footman in Paris, who used his fingers in place of sugar-tongs. So far as Johnson could recognize bad manners he was polite enough, though unluckily the limitation is one of considerable importance.

Johnson's claims to politeness were sometimes, it is true, put in a rather startling form. "Every man of any education," he once said to the amazement of his hearers, "would rather be called a rascal than accused of deficiency in the graces." Gibbon, who was present, slyly inquired of a lady whether among all her acquaintance she could not find *one* exception. According to Mrs. Thrale, he went even further. Dr. Barnard, he said, was the only man who had ever done justice to his good breeding; "and you may observe," he added, "that I am well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity." He proceeded, according to Mrs. Thrale, but the report a little taxes our faith, to claim the virtues not only of respecting ceremony, but of never contradicting or interrupting his hearers. It is rather odd that Dr. Barnard had once a sharp altercation with Johnson, and avenged himself by a sarcastic copy of verses in which, after professing to learn perfectness from different friends, he says,—

Johnson shall teach me how to place,  
In varied light, each borrow'd grace ;  
From him I'll learn to write ;  
Copy his clear familiar style,  
And by the roughness of his file,  
Grow, like himself, polite.

Johnson, on this as on many occasions, repented of the blow as soon as it was struck, and sat down by Barnard, "literally smoothing down his arms and knees," and beseeching pardon. Barnard accepted his apologies, but went home and wrote his little copy of verses.

Johnson's shortcomings in civility were no doubt due, in part, to the narrowness of his faculties of perception. He did not know, for he could not see, that his uncouth gestures and slovenly dress were offensive ; and he was not so well able to observe others as to shake off the manners contracted in Grub Street. It is hard to study a manual of etiquette late in life, and for a man of Johnson's imperfect faculties it was probably impossible. Errors of this kind were always pardonable, and are now simply ludicrous. But Johnson often shocked his companions by more indefensible conduct. He was irascible, overbearing, and, when angry, vehement beyond all propriety. He was a "tremendous companion," said Garrick's brother ; and men of gentle nature, like Charles Fox, often shrank from his company, and perhaps exaggerated his brutality.

Johnson, who had long regarded conversation as the chief amusement, came in later years to regard it as almost the chief employment of life ; and he had studied the art with the zeal of a man pursuing a favourable hobby. He had always, as he told Sir Joshua Reynolds, made it a principle to talk on all occasions as well as he could. He had thus obtained a mastery over his weapons which made him one of the most accomplished of conversational gladiators. He had one advantage which has pretty well disappeared from modern society, and the disappearance of which has been destructive to excellence of talk. A good talker, even more than a good orator, implies a good audience. Modern society is too vast and too restless to give a conversationalist a fair chance. For the formation of real proficiency in the art, friends should meet often, sit long, and be thoroughly at ease. A modern audience generally breaks up before it is well warmed through, and includes enough strangers to break the magic circle of social electricity. The clubs in which Johnson delighted were excellently adapted to foster his peculiar talent. There a man could "fold his legs and have his talk out"—a pleasure hardly to be enjoyed now. And there a set of friends meeting regularly, and meeting to talk, learnt to sharpen each other's skill in all dialectic manœuvres. Conversation may be pleasantest, as Johnson admitted, when two friends meet quietly to exchange their minds without any thought of display. But conversation considered as a

game, as a bout of intellectual sword-play, has also charms which Johnson intensely appreciated. His talk was not of the encyclopædia variety, like that of some more modern celebrities; but it was full of apposite illustrations and unrivalled in keen argument, rapid flashes of wit and humour, scornful retort and dexterous sophistry. Sometimes he would fell his adversary at a blow; his sword, as Boswell said, would be through your body in an instant without preliminary flourishes; and in the excitement of talking for victory, he would use any device that came to hand. "There is no arguing with Johnson," said Goldsmith, quoting a phrase from Cibber, "for if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it."

Johnson's view of conversation is indicated by his remark about Burke. "That fellow," he said at a time of illness, "calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now it would kill me." "It is when you come close to a man in conversation," he said on another occasion, "that you discover what his real abilities are. To make a speech in an assembly is a knack. Now I honour Thurlow, sir; Thurlow is a fine fellow; he fairly puts his mind to yours."

Johnson's retorts were fair play under the conditions of the game, as it is fair play to kick an opponent's shins at football. But of course a man who had, as it were, become the acknowledged champion of the ring, and who had an irascible and thoroughly dogmatic temper, was tempted to become unduly imperious. In the company of which Savage was a distinguished member, one may guess that the conversational fervour sometimes degenerated into horse-play. Want of arguments would be supplied by personality, and the champion would avenge himself by brutality on an opponent who happened for once to be getting the best of him. Johnson, as he grew older and got into more polished society, became milder in his manners; but he had enough of the old spirit left in him to break forth at times with ungovernable fury, and astonish the well-regulated minds of respectable ladies and gentlemen.

Anecdotes illustrative of this ferocity abound, and his best friends—except, perhaps, Reynolds and Burke—had all to suffer in turn. On one occasion, when he had made a rude speech even to Reynolds, Boswell states, though with some hesitation, his belief that Johnson actually blushed. The records of his contests in this kind fill a large space in Boswell's pages. That they did not lead to worse consequences shows his absence of rancour. He was always ready and anxious for a reconciliation, though he would not press for one if his first overtures were rejected. There was no venom in the wounds he inflicted, for there was no ill-nature; he was rough in the heat of the struggle, and in such cases careless in distributing blows; but he never enjoyed giving pain. None of his tiffs ripened into permanent quarrels, and he seems scarcely to have lost a friend. He is a pleasant contrast in this, as in much else, to Horace Walpole, who succeeded,



in the course of a long life, in breaking with almost all his old friends. No man set a higher value upon friendship than Johnson. "A man," he said to Reynolds, "ought to keep his friendship in constant repair;" or he would find himself left alone as he grew older. "I look upon a day as lost," he said later in life, "in which I do not make a new acquaintance." Making new acquaintances did not involve dropping the old. The list of his friends is a long one, and includes, as it were, successive layers, superposed upon each other, from the earliest period of his life.

This is so marked a feature in Johnson's character that it will be as well at this point to notice some of the friendships from which he derived the greatest part of his happiness. Two of his schoolfellows, Hector and Taylor, remained his intimates through life. Hector survived to give information to Boswell, and Taylor, then a prebendary of Westminster, read the funeral service over his old friend in the Abbey. He showed, said one of the bystanders, too little feeling. The relation between the two men was not one of special tenderness; indeed, they were so little congenial that Boswell rather gratuitously suspected his venerable teacher of having an eye to Taylor's will. It seems fairer to regard the acquaintance as an illustration of that curious adhesiveness which made Johnson cling to less attractive persons. At any rate, he did not show the complacency of the proper will-hunter. Taylor was rector of Bosworth and squire of Ashbourne. He was a fine specimen of the squire-parson; a justice of the peace, a warm politician, and, what was worse, a warm Whig. He raised gigantic bulls, bragged of selling cows for 120 guineas and more, and kept a noble butler in purple clothes and a large white wig. Johnson respected Taylor as a sensible man, but was ready to have a round with him on occasion. He snorted contempt when Taylor talked of breaking some small vessels if he took an emetic. "Bah," said the doctor, who regarded a valetudinarian as a "scoundrel," "if you have so many things that will break, you had better break your neck at once, and there's an end on't." Nay, if he did not condemn Taylor's cows, he criticized his bulldog with cruel acuteness. "No, sir, he is not well shaped; for there is not the quick transition from the thickness of the fore-part to the *tenuity*—the thin part—behind, which a bulldog ought to have." On the more serious topics of politics his Jacobite fulminations roused Taylor "to a pitch of bellowing." Johnson roared out that if the people of England were fairly polled (this was in 1777) the present king would be sent away to-night, and his adherents hanged to-morrow. Johnson, however, rendered Taylor the substantial service of writing sermons for him, two volumes of which were published after they were both dead; and Taylor must have been a bold man, if it be true, as has been said, that he refused to preach a sermon written by Johnson upon Mrs. Johnson's death, on the ground that it spoke too favourably of the character of the deceased.

Johnson paid frequent visits to Lichfield to keep up his old friends. One of them was Lucy Porter, his wife's daughter, with whom, according to Miss Seward, he had been in love before he married her mother. He was at least tenderly attached to her through life. And, for the most part, the good people of Lichfield seem to have been proud of their fellow-townsmen, and gave him a substantial proof of their sympathy by continuing to him, on favourable terms, the lease of a house originally granted to his father. There was, indeed, one remarkable exception in Miss Seward, who belonged to a genus specially contemptible to the old doctor. She was one of the fine ladies who dabbled in poetry, and aimed at being the centre of a small literary circle at Lichfield. Her letters are amongst the most amusing illustrations of the petty affectations and squabbles characteristic of such a provincial clique. She evidently hated Johnson at the bottom of her small soul; and, indeed, though Johnson once paid her a preposterous compliment—a weakness of which this stern moralist was apt to be guilty in the company of ladies—he no doubt trod pretty roughly upon some of her pet vanities.

By far the most celebrated of Johnson's Lichfield friends was David Garrick, in regard to whom his relations were somewhat peculiar. Reynolds said that Johnson considered Garrick to be his own property, and would never allow him to be praised or blamed by any one else without contradiction. Reynolds composed a pair of imaginary dialogues to illustrate the proposition, in one of which Johnson attacks Garrick in answer to Reynolds, and in the other defends him in answer to Gibbon. The dialogues seem to be very good reproductions of the Johnsonian manner, though perhaps the courteous Reynolds was a little too much impressed by its roughness; and they probably include many genuine remarks of Johnson's. It is remarkable that the praise is far more pointed and elaborate than the blame, which turns chiefly upon the general inferiority of an actor's position. And, in fact, this seems to have corresponded to Johnson's opinion about Garrick as gathered from Boswell.

The two men had at bottom a considerable regard for each other, founded upon old association, mutual services, and reciprocal respect for talents of very different orders. But they were so widely separated by circumstances, as well as by a radical opposition of temperament, that any close intimacy could hardly be expected. The bear and the monkey are not likely to be intimate friends. Garrick's rapid elevation in fame and fortune seems to have produced a certain degree of envy in his old schoolmaster. A grave moral philosopher has, of course, no right to look askance at the rewards which fashion lavishes upon men of lighter and less lasting merit, and which he professes to despise. Johnson, however, was troubled with a rather excessive allowance of human nature. Moreover he had the good old-fashioned contempt for players, characteristic both of the Tory

and the inartistic mind. He asserted roundly that he looked upon players as no better than dancing-dogs. "But, sir, you will allow that some players are better than others?" "Yes, sir, as some dogs dance better than others." So when Goldsmith accused Garrick of grossly flattering the queen, Johnson exclaimed, "And as to meanness—how is it mean in a player, a showman, a fellow who exhibits himself for a shilling, to flatter his queen?" At another time Boswell suggested that we might respect a great player. "What! sir," exclaimed Johnson, "a fellow who claps a hump upon his back and a lump on his leg and cries, '*I am Richard III.*'? Nay, sir, a ballad-singer is a higher man, for he does two things: he repeats and he sings; there is both recitation and music in his performance—the player only recites."

Such sentiments were not very likely to remain unknown to Garrick nor to put him at ease with Johnson, whom, indeed, he always suspected of laughing at him. They had a little tiff on account of Johnson's Edition of Shakspeare. From some misunderstanding, Johnson did not make use of Garrick's collection of old plays. Johnson, it seems, thought that Garrick should have courted him more, and perhaps sent the plays to his house; whereas Garrick, knowing that Johnson treated books with a roughness ill-suited to their constitution, thought that he had done quite enough by asking Johnson to come to his library. The revenge—if it was revenge—taken by Johnson was to say nothing of Garrick in his Preface, and to glance obliquely at his non-communication of his rarities. He seems to have thought that it would be a lowering of Shakspeare to admit that his fame owed anything to Garrick's exertions.

Boswell innocently communicated to Garrick a criticism of Johnson's upon one of his poems—

I'd smile with the simple and feed with the poor.

"Let me smile with the wise and feed with the rich," was Johnson's tolerably harmless remark. Garrick, however, did not like it, and when Boswell tried to console him by saying that Johnson gored everybody in turn, and added, "*ferum habet in cornu.*" "Ay," said Garrick vehemently, "he has a whole mow of it."

The most unpleasant incident was when Garrick proposed rather too freely to be a member of the Club. Johnson said that the first duke in England had no right to use such language, and said, according to Mrs. Thrale, "If Garrick does apply, I'll blackball him. Surely we ought to be able to sit in a society like ours—

'Unelbowed by a gamester, pimp, or player!'

Nearly ten years afterwards, however, Johnson favoured his elec-



tion, and when he died, declared that the Club should have a year's widowhood. No successor to Garrick was elected during that time.

Johnson sometimes ventured to criticise Garrick's acting, but here Garrick could take his full revenge. The purblind Johnson was not, we may imagine, much of a critic in such matters. Garrick reports him to have said of an actor at Lichfield, "There is a courtly vivacity about the fellow;" when, in fact, said Garrick, "he was the most vulgar ruffian that ever went upon boards."

In spite of such collisions of opinion and mutual criticism, Johnson seems to have spoken in the highest terms of Garrick's good qualities, and they had many pleasant meetings. Garrick takes a prominent part in two or three of the best conversations in Boswell, and seems to have put his interlocutors in specially good temper. Johnson declared him to be "the first man in the world for sprightly conversation." He said that Dryden had written much better prologues than any of Garrick's, but that Garrick had written more good prologues than Dryden. He declared that it was wonderful how little Garrick had been spoilt by all the flattery that he had received. No wonder if he was a little vain: "a man who is perpetually flattered in every mode that can be conceived: so many bellows have blown the fuel, that one wonders he is not by this time become a cinder!" "If all this had happened to me," he said on another occasion, "I should have had a couple of fellows with long poles walking before me, to knock down everybody that stood in the way. Consider, if all this had happened to Cibber and Quin, they'd have jumped over the moon. Yet Garrick speaks to us," smiling. He admitted at the same time that Garrick had raised the profession of a player. He defended Garrick, too, against the common charge of avarice. Garrick, as he pointed out, had been brought up in a family whose study it was to make fourpence go as far as fourpence-halfpenny. Johnson remembered in early days drinking tea with Garrick when Peg Woffington made it, and made it, as Garrick grumbled, "as red as blood." But when Garrick became rich he became liberal. He had, so Johnson declared, given away more money than any man in England.

After Garrick's death, Johnson took occasion to say, in the *Lives of the Poets*, that the death "had eclipsed the gaiety of nations and diminished the public stock of harmless pleasures." Boswell ventured to criticise the observation rather spitefully. "Why nations? Did his gaiety extend further than his own nation?" "Why, sir," replied Johnson, "some imagination must be allowed. Besides, we may say *nations* if we allow the Scotch to be a nation, and to have gaiety—which they have not." On the whole, in spite of various drawbacks Johnson's reported observations upon Garrick will appear to be discriminative, and yet, on the whole, strongly favourable to his character. Yet we are not quite surprised that Mrs. Garrick did not respond to a hint thrown out by Johnson, that he would be glad to write the life of his friend.

At Oxford, Johnson acquired the friendship of Dr. Adams, afterwards Master of Pembroke and author of a once well-known reply to Hume's argument upon miracles. He was an amiable man, and was proud to do the honours of the university to his old friend, when, in later years, Johnson revisited the much-loved scenes of his neglected youth. The warmth of Johnson's regard for old days is oddly illustrated by an interview recorded by Boswell with one Edwards, a fellow-student whom he met again in 1778, not having previously seen him since 1729. They had lived in London for forty years without once meeting, a fact more surprising then than now. Boswell eagerly gathered up the little scraps of college anecdote which the meeting produced, but perhaps his best find was a phrase of Edwards himself. "You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson," he said; "I have tried, too, in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." The phrase, as Boswell truly says, records an exquisite trait of character.

Of the friends who gathered round Johnson during his period of struggle, many had vanished before he became well known. The best loved of all seems to have been Dr. Bathurst, a physician, who, failing to obtain practice, joined the expedition to Havannah, and fell a victim to the climate (1762). Upon him Johnson pronounced a panegyric which has contributed a proverbial phrase to the language. "Dear Bathurst," he said, "was a man to my very heart's content: he hated a fool and he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig; he was a *very good hater*." Johnson remembered Bathurst in his prayers for years after his loss, and received from him a peculiar legacy. Francis Barber had been the negro slave of Bathurst's father, who left him his liberty by will. Dr. Bathurst allowed him to enter Johnson's service; and Johnson sent him to school at considerable expense, and afterwards retained him in his service with little interruption till his own death. Once Barber ran away to sea, and was discharged, oddly enough, by the good offices of Wilkes, to whom Smollet applied on Johnson's behalf. Barber became an important member of Johnson's family, some of whom reproached him for his liberality to the nigger. No one ever solved the great problem as to what services were rendered by Barber to his master, whose wig was "as impenetrable by a comb as a quickset hedge," and whose clothes were never touched by the brush.

Among the other friends of this period must be reckoned his biographer, Hawkins, an attorney who was afterwards Chairman of the Middlesex Justices, and knighted on presenting an address to the King. Boswell regarded poor Sir John Hawkins with all the animosity of a rival author, and with some spice of wounded vanity. He was grievously offended, so at least says Sir John's daughter, on being described in the *Life of Johnson* as "Mr. James Boswell," without a solitary epithet such as celebrated or well-known. If that was really

his feeling, he had his revenge ; for no one book ever so suppressed another as Boswell's Life suppressed Hawkins's. In truth, Hawkins was a solemn prig, remarkable chiefly for the unusual intensity of his conviction that all virtue consists in respectability. He had a special aversion to "goodness of heart," which he regarded as another name for a quality properly called extravagance or vice. Johnson's tenacity of old acquaintance introduced him into the Club, where he made himself so disagreeable, especially, as it seems, by rudeness to Burke, that he found it expedient to invent a pretext for resignation. Johnson called him a "very unclubable man," and may perhaps have intended him in a quaint description : "I really believe him to be an honest man at the bottom ; though, to be sure, he is rather penurious, and he is somewhat mean ; and it must be owned he has some degree of brutality, and is not without a tendency to savageness that cannot well be defended."

In a list of Johnson's friends it is proper to mention Richardson and Hawkesworth. Richardson seems to have given him substantial help, and was repaid by favourable comparisons with Fielding, scarcely borne out by the verdict of posterity. "Fielding," said Johnson, "could tell the hour by looking at the clock ; whilst Richardson knew how the clock was made." "There is more knowledge of the heart," he said at another time, "in one letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*." Johnson's preference of the sentimentalist to the man whose humour and strong sense were so like his own, shows how much his criticism was biassed by his prejudices : though, of course, Richardson's external decency was a recommendation to the moralist. Hawkesworth's intimacy with Johnson seems to have been chiefly in the period between the *Dictionary* and the pension. He was considered to be Johnson's best imitator ; and has vanished like other imitators. His fate, very doubtful if the story believed at the time be true, was a curious one for a friend of Johnson's. He had made some sceptical remarks as to the efficacy of prayer in his preface to the *South Sea Voyages* ; and was so bitterly attacked by a "Christian" in the papers, that he destroyed himself by a dose of opium.

Two younger friends, who became disciples of the sage soon after the appearance of the *Rambler*, are prominent figures in the later circle. One of these was Bennet Langton, a man of good family, fine scholarship, and very amiable character. His exceedingly tall and slender figure was compared by Best to the stork in Raphael's cartoon of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes. Miss Hawkins describes him sitting with one leg twisted round the other as though to occupy the smallest possible space, and playing with his gold snuff-box with a mild countenance and sweet smile. The gentle, modest creature was loved by Johnson, who could warm into unusual eloquence in singing his praises. The doctor, however, was rather fond of discussing with



Boswell the faults of his friend. They seem to have chiefly consisted in a certain languor or sluggishness of temperament which allowed his affairs to get into perplexity. Once, when arguing the delicate question as to the propriety of telling a friend of his wife's unfaithfulness, Boswell, after his peculiar fashion, chose to enliven the abstract statement by the purely imaginary hypothesis of Mr. and Mrs. Langton being in this position. Johnson said that it would be useless to tell Langton, because he would be too sluggish to get a divorce. Once Langton was the unconscious cause of one of Johnson's oddest performances. Langton had employed Chambers, a common friend of his and Johnson's, to draw his will. Johnson, talking to Chambers and Boswell, was suddenly struck by the absurdity of his friend's appearing in the character of testator. His companions, however, were utterly unable to see in what the joke consisted; but Johnson laughed obstreperously and irrepressibly; he laughed till he reached the Temple Gate; and when in Fleet Street went almost into convulsions of hilarity. Holding on by one of the posts in the street, he sent forth such peals of laughter that they seemed in the silence of the night to resound from Temple Bar to Fleet Ditch.

Not long before his death, Johnson applied to Langton for spiritual advice. "I desired him to tell me sincerely in what he thought my life was faulty." Langton wrote upon a sheet of paper certain texts recommending Christian charity; and explained, upon inquiry, that he was pointing at Johnson's habit of contradiction. The old doctor began by thanking him earnestly for his kindness; but gradually waxed savage and asked Langton, in a loud and angry tone, "What is your drift, sir?" He complained of the well-meant advice to Boswell, with a sense that he had been unjustly treated. It was a scene for a comedy, as Reynolds observed, to see a penitent get into a passion and belabour his confessor.

Through Langton, Johnson became acquainted with the man whose manner was in the strongest contrast to his own. Topham Beauclerk was a man of fashion. He was commended to Johnson by a likeness to Charles II., from whom he was descended, being the grandson of the first Duke of St. Alban's. Beauclerk was a man of literary and scientific tastes. He inherited some of the moral laxity which Johnson chose to pardon in his ancestor. Some years after his acquaintance with Boswell he married Lady Diana Spencer, a lady who had been divorced on his account from her husband, Lord Bolingbroke. But he took care not to obtrude his faults of life, whatever they may have been, upon the old moralist, who entertained for him a peculiar affection. He specially admired Beauclerk's skill in the use of a more polished, if less vigorous, style of conversation than his own. He envied the ease with which Beauclerk brought out his sly incisive retorts. "No man," he said, "ever was so free when he was going to say a good thing, from a look that expressed that it was coming; or,

when he had said it, from a look that expressed that it had come." When Beauclerk was dying (in 1780), Johnson said, with a faltering voice, that he would walk to the extremity of the diameter of the earth to save him. Two little anecdotes are expressive of his tender feeling for this incongruous friend. Boswell had asked him to sup at Beauclerk's. He started, but, on the way, recollecting himself, said, "I cannot go; but *I do not love Beauclerk the less.*" Beauclerk had put upon a portrait of Johnson the inscription,—

Ingenium ingens  
Inculto latet hoc sub corpore.

Langton, who bought the portrait, had the inscription removed. "It was kind in you to take it off," said Johnson; and, after a short pause, "not unkind in him to put it on."

Early in their acquaintance, the two young men, Beau and Lanky, as Johnson called them, had sat up one night at a tavern till three in the morning. The courageous thought struck them that they would knock up the old philosopher. He came to the door of his chambers, poker in hand, with an old wig for a nightcap. On hearing their errand, the sage exclaimed, "What! is it you, you dogs? I'll have a frisk with you." And so Johnson with the two youths, his juniors by about thirty years, proceeded to make a night of it. They amazed the fruiterers in Covent Garden; they brewed a bowl of bishop in a tavern, while Johnson quoted the poet's address to Sleep,—

"Short, O short, be then thy reign,  
And give us to the world again!"

They took a boat to Billingsgate, and Johnson, with Beauclerk, kept up their amusement for the following day, when Langton deserted them to go to breakfast with some young ladies, and Johnson scolded him for leaving his friends "to go and sit with a parcel of wretched *unidea'd* girls." "I shall have my old friend to bail out of the round-house," said Garrick when he heard of this queer alliance; and he told Johnson that he would be in the *Chronicle* for his frolic. "He *durst* not do such a thing. His wife would not let him," was the moralist's retort.

Some friends, known to fame by other titles than their connexion with Johnson, had by this time gathered round them. Among them was one, whose art he was unable to appreciate, but whose fine social qualities and dignified equability of temper made him a valued and respected companion. Reynolds had settled in London at the end of 1752. Johnson met him at the house of Miss Cotterell. Reynolds had specially admired Johnson's *Life of Savage*, and, on their first meeting, happened to make a remark which delighted Johnson. The ladies were regretting the loss of a friend to whom they were under

obligations. "You have, however," said Reynolds, "the comfort of being relieved from a burden of gratitude." The saying is a little too much like Rochefoucauld, and too true to be pleasant; but it was one of those keen remarks which Johnson appreciated because they prick a bubble of commonplace moralizing without demanding too literal an acceptance. He went home to sup with Reynolds and became his intimate friend. On another occasion, Johnson was offended by two ladies of rank at the same house, and by way of taking down their pride, asked Reynolds in a loud voice, "How much do you think you and I could get in a week, if we both worked as hard as we could?" "His appearance," says Sir Joshua's sister, Miss Reynolds, "might suggest the poor author: as he was not likely in that place to be a blacksmith or a porter." Poor Miss Reynolds, who tells this story, was another attraction to Reynolds's house. She was a shy, retiring maiden lady, who vexed her famous brother by following in his steps without his talents, and was deeply hurt by his annoyance at the unintentional mockery. Johnson was through life a kind and judicious friend to her; and had attracted her on their first meeting by a significant indication of his character. He said that when going home to his lodgings at one or two in the morning, he often saw poor children asleep on thresholds and stalls—the wretched "street Arabs" of the day—and that he used to put pennies into their hands that they might buy a breakfast.

Two friends, who deserve to be placed beside Reynolds, came from Ireland to seek their fortunes in London. Edmund Burke, incomparably the greatest writer upon political philosophy in English literature, the master of a style unrivaled for richness, flexibility, and vigour, was radically opposed to Johnson on party questions, though his language upon the French Revolution, after Johnson's death, would have satisfied even the strongest prejudices of his old friend. But he had qualities which commended him even to the man who called him a "bottomless Whig," and who generally spoke of Whigs as rascals, and maintained that the first Whig was the devil. If his intellect was wider, his heart was as warm as Johnson's, and in conversation he merited the generous applause and warm emulation of his friends. Johnson was never tired of praising the extraordinary readiness and spontaneity of Burke's conversation. "If a man," he said, "went under a shed at the same time with Burke to avoid a shower, he would say, 'This is an extraordinary man.' Or if Burke went into a stable to see his horse dressed, the ostler would say, 'We have had an extraordinary man here.'" When Burke was first going into Parliament, Johnson said in answer to Hawkins, who wondered that such a man should get a seat, "We who know Mr. Burke, know that he will be one of the first men in the country." Speaking of certain other members of Parliament, more after the heart of Sir John Hawkins, he said that he grudged success to a man who made a fig-



ure by a knowledge of a few forms, though his mind was "as narrow as the neck of a vinegar cruet;" but then he did not grudge Burke's being the first man in the House of Commons, for he would be the first man everywhere. And Burke equally admitted Johnson's supremacy in conversation. "It is enough for me," he said to some one who regretted Johnson's monopoly of the talk on a particular occasion, "to have rung the bell for him."

The other Irish adventurer, whose career was more nearly moulded upon that of Johnson, came to London in 1756, and made Johnson's acquaintance. Some time afterwards (in or before 1761) Goldsmith, like Johnson, had tasted the bitterness of an usher's life, and escaped into the scarcely more tolerable regions of Grub Street. After some years of trial, he was becoming known to the booksellers as a serviceable hand, and had two works in his desk destined to lasting celebrity. His landlady (apparently 1764) one day arrested him for debt. Johnson, summoned to his assistance, sent him a guinea and speedily followed. The guinea had already been changed, and Goldsmith was consoling himself with a bottle of Madeira. Johnson corked the bottle, and a discussion of ways and means brought out the manuscript of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Johnson looked into it, took it to a bookseller, got sixty pounds for it, and returned to Goldsmith, who paid his rent and administered a sound rating to his landlady.

The relation thus indicated is characteristic; Johnson was as a rough but helpful elder brother to poor Goldsmith, gave him advice, sympathy, and applause, and at times criticised him pretty sharply, or brought down his conversational bludgeon upon his sensitive friend. "He has nothing of the bear but his skin," was Goldsmith's comment upon his clumsy friend, and the two men appreciated each other at bottom. Some of their readers may be inclined to resent Johnson's attitude of superiority. The admirably pure and tender heart, and the exquisite intellectual refinement implied in the *Vicar* and the *Traveller*, force us to love Goldsmith in spite of superficial foibles, and when Johnson prunes or interrolates lines in the *Traveller*, we feel as though a woodman's axe was hacking at a most delicate piece of carving. The evidence of contemporary observers, however, must force impartial readers to admit that poor Goldsmith's foibles were real, however amply compensated by rare and admirable qualities. Garrick's assertion, that he "wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll," expresses the unanimous opinion of all who had actually seen him. Undoubtedly some of the stories of his childlike vanity, his frankly expressed envy, and his general capacity for blundering, owe something to Boswell's feeling that he was a rival near the throne, and sometimes poor Goldsmith's humorous self-assertion may have been taken too seriously by blunt English wits. One may doubt, for example, whether he was really jealous of a puppet tossing a pike, and unconscious of his absurdity in saying "Pshaw! I could do it

better myself !” Boswell, however, was too good an observer to misrepresent at random, and he has, in fact, explained very well the true meaning of his remarks. Goldsmith was an excitable Irishman of genius, who tumbled out whatever came uppermost, and revealed the feelings of the moment with utter want of reserve. His self-controlled companions wondered, ridiculed, misinterpreted, and made fewer hits as well as fewer misses. His anxiety to “get in and shine” made him, according to Johnson, an “unsocial” companion. “Goldsmith,” he said, “had not temper enough for the game he played. He staked too much. A man might always get a fall from his inferior in the chances of talk, and Goldsmith felt his falls too keenly.” He had certainly some trials of temper in Johnson’s company. “Stay, stay,” said a German, stopping him in the full flow of his eloquence, “Doctor Johnson is going to say something.” An Eton Master called Graham, who was supping with the two doctors, and had got to the pitch of looking at one person, and talking to another, said, “Doctor, I shall be glad to see *you* at Eton.” “I shall be glad to wait on you,” said Goldsmith. “No,” replied Graham, “’tis not you I mean, Doctor Minor ; ’tis Doctor Major there.” Poor Goldsmith said afterwards, “Graham is a fellow to make one commit suicide.”

Boswell, who attributes some of Goldsmith’s sayings about Johnson to envy, said with probable truth that Goldsmith had not more envy than others, but only spoke of it more freely. Johnson argued that we must be angry with a man who had so much of an odious quality that he could not keep it to himself, but let it “boil over.” The feeling, at any rate, was momentary and totally free from malice ; and Goldsmith’s criticisms upon Johnson and his idolators seem to have been fair enough. His objection to Boswell’s substituting a monarchy for a republic has already been mentioned. At another time he checked Boswell’s flow of panegyric by asking, “Is he like Burke, who winds into a subject like a serpent ?” To which Boswell replied with charming irrelevance, “Johnson is the Hercules who strangled serpents in his cradle.” The last of Goldsmith’s hits was suggested by Johnson’s shaking his sides with laughter because Goldsmith admired the skill with which the little fishes in the fable were made to talk in character. “Why, Dr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think,” was the retort, “for if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales.”

In spite of sundry little sparrings, Johnson fully appreciated Goldsmith’s genius. Possibly his authority hastened the spread of public appreciation, as he seemed to claim, whilst repudiating Boswell’s too flattering theory that it had materially raised Goldsmith’s position. When Reynolds quoted the authority of Fox in favour of the *Traveller*, saying that his friends might suspect that they had been too partial, Johnson replied very truly that the *Traveller* was beyond the need of Fox’s praise, and that the partiality of Goldsmith’s friends had

always been against him. They would hardly give him a hearing. "Goldsmith," he added, "was a man who, whatever he wrote, always did it better than any other man could do." Johnson's settled opinion in fact was that embodied in the famous epitaph with its "nihil tetigit quod non ornavit," and, though dedications are perhaps the only literary product more generally insincere than epitaphs, we may believe that Goldsmith too meant what he said in the dedication of *She Stoops to Conquer*. "It may do me some honour to inform the public that I have lived many years in intimacy with you. It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform them that the greatest wit may be found in a character, without impairing the most unaffected piety."

Though Johnson was thus rich in friendship, two connexions have still to be noticed which had an exceptional bearing upon his fame and happiness. In January, 1765, he made the acquaintance of the Thrales. Mr. Thrale was the proprietor of the brewery which afterwards became that of Barclay and Perkins. He was married in 1763 to a Miss Hester Lynch Salisbury, who has become celebrated from her friendship with Johnson.\* She was a woman of great vivacity and independence of character. She had a sensitive and passionate, if not a very tender nature, and enough literary culture to appreciate Johnson's intellectual power, and on occasion to play a very respectable part in conversation. She had far more Latin and English scholarship than fell to the lot of most ladies of her day, and wit enough to preserve her from degenerating like some of the "blues," into that most offensive of beings—a feminine prig. Her marriage had been one of convenience, and her husband's want of sympathy, and jealousy of any interference in business matters, forced her, she says, to take to literature as her sole resource. "No wonder," she adds, "if I loved my books and children." It is, perhaps, more to be wondered at that her children seem to have had a rather subordinate place in her affections. The marriage, however, though not of the happiest, was perfectly decorous. Mrs. Thrale discharged her domestic duties irreproachably, even when she seems to have had some real cause of complaint. To the world she eclipsed her husband, a solid respectable man, whose mind, according to Johnson, struck the hours very regularly, though it did not mark the minutes.

The Thrales were introduced to Johnson by their common friend, Arthur Murphy, an actor and dramatist, who afterwards became the editor of Johnson's works. One day, when calling upon Johnson, they found him in such a fit of despair that Thrale tried to stop his mouth by placing his hand before it. The pair then joined in begging Johnson to leave his solitary abode, and come to them at

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\* Mrs. Thrale was born in 1740 or 1741, probably the latter. Thrale was born 1724.



their country-house at Streatham. He complied, and for the next sixteen years a room was set apart for him, both at Streatham and in their house in Southwark. He passed a large part of his time with them, and derived from the intimacy most of the comfort of his later years. He treated Mrs. Thrale with a kind of paternal gallantry, her age at the time of their acquaintance being about twenty-four, and his fifty-five. He generally called her by the playful name of "my mistress," addressed little poems to her, gave her solid advice, and gradually came to confide to her his miseries and ailments with rather surprising frankness. She flattered and amused him, and soothed his sufferings and did something towards humanizing his rugged exterior. There was one little grievance between them which requires notice. Johnson's pet virtue in private life was a rigid regard for truth. He spoke, it was said of him, as if he was always on oath. He would not, for example, allow his servant to use the phrase "not at home," and even in the heat of conversation resisted the temptation to give point to an anecdote. The lively Mrs. Thrale rather fretted against the restraint, and Johnson admonished her in vain. He complained to Boswell that she was willing to have that said of her, which the best of mankind had died rather than have said of them. Boswell, the faithful imitator of his master in this respect, delighted in taking up the parable. "Now, madam, give me leave to catch you in the fact," he said on one occasion; "it was not an old woman, but an old man whom I mentioned, as having told me this," and he recounts his check to the "lively lady" with intense complacency. As may be imagined, Boswell and Mrs. Thrale did not love each other, in spite of the well-meant efforts of the sage to bring about a friendly feeling between his disciples.

It is time to close this list of friends with the inimitable Boswell. James Boswell, born in 1740, was the eldest son of a Whig laird and lord of sessions. He had acquired some English friends at the Scotch universities, among whom must be mentioned Mr. Temple, an English clergyman. Boswell's correspondence with Temple, discovered years after his death by a singular chance, and published in 1857, is, after the Life of Johnson, one of the most curious exhibitions of character in the language. Boswell was intended for the Scotch bar, and studied civil law at Utrecht in the winter of 1762. It was in the following summer that he made Johnson's acquaintance.

Perhaps the fundamental quality in Boswell's character was his intense capacity for enjoyment. He was, as Mr. Carlyle puts it, "glut-tionously fond of whatever would yield him a little solacement, were it only of a stomachic character." His love of good living and good drink would have made him a hearty admirer of his countryman, Burns, had Burns been famous in Boswell's youth. Nobody could have joined with more thorough abandonment in the chorus to the poet's liveliest songs in praise of love and wine. He would have made

an excellent fourth when "Willie brewed a peck of malt, and Rab and Allan came to see," and the drinking contest for the Whistle commemorated in another lyric would have excited his keenest interest. He was always delighted when he could get Johnson to discuss the ethics and statistics of drinking. "I am myself," he says, "a lover of wine, and therefore curious to hear whatever is remarkable concerning drinking." The remark is *à propos* to a story of Dr. Campbell drinking thirteen bottles of port at a sitting. Lest this should seem incredible, he quotes Johnson's dictum. "Sir, if a man drinks very slowly and lets one glass evaporate before he takes another, I know not how long he may drink." Boswell's faculty for making love was as great as his power of drinking. His letters to Temple record with amusing frankness the vicissitudes of some of his courtships and the versatility of his passions.

Boswell's tastes, however, were by no means limited to sensual or frivolous enjoyments. His appreciation of the bottle was combined with an equally hearty sensibility to more intellectual pleasures. He had not a spark of philosophic or poetic power, but within the ordinary range of such topics as can be discussed at a dinner-party, he had an abundant share of liveliness and intelligence. His palate was as keen for good talk as for good wine. He was an admirable recipient, if not an originator, of shrewd or humorous remarks upon life and manners. What in regard to sensual enjoyment was mere gluttony, appeared in higher matters as an insatiable curiosity. At times this faculty became intolerable to his neighbours. "I will not be baited with what and why," said poor Johnson, one day in desperation. "Why is a cow's tail long? Why is a fox's tail bushy?" "Sir," said Johnson on another occasion, when Boswell was cross-examining a third person about him in his presence, "you have but two subjects, yourself and me. I am sick of both." Boswell, however, was not to be repelled by such a retort as this, or even by ruder rebuffs. Once when discussing the means of getting a friend to leave London, Johnson said in revenge for a previous offence, "Nay, sir, we'll send you to him. If your presence doesn't drive a man out of his house, nothing will." Boswell was "horribly shocked," but he still stuck to his victim like a leech, and pried into the minutest details of his life and manners. He observed with conscientious accuracy that though Johnson abstained from milk one fast-day, he did not reject it when put in his cup. He notes the whistlings and puffings, the trick of saying "too-too-too," of his idol: and it was a proud day when he won a bet by venturing to ask Johnson what he did with certain scraped bits of orange-peel. His curiosity was not satisfied on this occasion; but it would have made him the prince of interviewers in these days. Nothing delighted him so much as rubbing shoulders with any famous or notorious person. He scraped acquaintance with Voltaire, Wesley, Rousseau, and Paoli, as well as with Mrs. Rudd, a

forgotten heroine of the *Newgate Calendar*. He was as eager to talk to Hume the sceptic, or Wilkes the demagogue, as to the orthodox Tory, Johnson; and, if repelled, it was from no deficiency in daring. In 1767, he took advantage of his travels in Corsica to introduce himself to Lord Chatham, then Prime Minister. The letter moderately ends by asking, "*Could your lordship find time to honour me now and then with a letter?*" I have been told how favourably your lordship has spoken of me. To correspond with a Paoli and with a Chatham is enough to keep a young man ever ardent in the pursuit of virtuous fame." No other young man of the day, we may be sure, would have dared to make such a proposal to the majestic orator.

His absurd vanity, and the greedy craving for notoriety at any cost, would have made Boswell the most offensive of mortals, had not his unfeigned good-humour disarmed enmity. Nobody could help laughing, or be inclined to take offence at his harmless absurdities. Burke said of him that he had so much good-humour naturally, that it was scarcely a virtue. His vanity, in fact, did not generate affectation. Most vain men are vain of qualities which they do not really possess, or possess in a lower degree than they fancy. They are always acting a part, and become touchy from a half-conscious sense of the imposture. But Boswell seems to have had few such illusions. He thoroughly and unfeignedly enjoyed his own peculiarities, and thought his real self much too charming an object to be in need of any disguise. No man, therefore, was ever less embarrassed by any regard for his own dignity. He was as ready to join in a laugh at himself as in a laugh at his neighbours. He reveals his own absurdities to the world at large as frankly as Pepys confided them to a journal in cypher. He tells us how drunk he got one night in Skye, and how he cured his headache with brandy next morning; and what an intolerable fool he made of himself at an evening party in London after a dinner with the Duke of Montrose, and how Johnson in vain did his best to keep him quiet. His motive for the concession is partly the wish to illustrate Johnson's indulgence, and, in the last case, to introduce a copy of apologetic verses to the lady whose guest he had been. He reveals other weaknesses with equal frankness. One day, he says, "I owned to Johnson that I was occasionally troubled with a fit of narrowness." "Why, sir," said he, "so am I. *But I do not tell it.*" Boswell enjoys the joke far too heartily to act upon the advice.

There is nothing, however, which Boswell seems to have enjoyed more heartily than his own good impulses. He looks upon his virtuous resolution with a sort of æsthetic satisfaction, and with the glow of a virtuous man contemplating a promising penitent. Whilst suffering severely from the consequences of imprudent conduct, he gets a letter of virtuous advice from his friend Temple. He instantly sees himself reformed for the rest of his days. "My warm imagination," he says, "looks forward with great complacency on the sobriety, the



healthfulness, and worth of my future life." "Every instance of our doing those things which we ought not to have done, and leaving undone those things which we ought to have done, is attended," as he elsewhere sagely observes, "with more or less of what is truly remorse;" but he seems rather to have enjoyed even the remorse. It is needless to say that the complacency was its own reward, and that the resolution vanished like other more eccentric impulses. Music, he once told Johnson, affected him intensely, producing in his mind "alternate sensations of pathetic dejection, so that I was ready to shed tears, and of daring resolution so that I was inclined to rush into the thickest of the [purely hypothetical] battle." "Sir," replied Johnson, "I should never hear it, if it made me such a fool." Elsewhere he expresses a wish to "fly to the woods," or retire into a desert, a disposition which Johnson checked by one of his habitual gibes at the quantity of easily accessible desert in Scotland. Boswell is equally frank in describing himself in situations more provocative of contempt than even drunkenness in a drawing-room. He tells us how dreadfully frightened he was by a storm at sea in the Hebrides, and how one of his companions, "with a happy readiness," made him lay hold of a rope fastened to the masthead, and told him to pull it when he was ordered. Boswell was thus kept quiet in mind and harmless in body.

This extreme simplicity of character makes poor Boswell loveable in his way. If he sought notoriety, he did not so far mistake his powers as to set up for independent notoriety.\* He was content to shine in reflected light: and the affectations with which he is charged seem to have been unconscious imitations of his great idol. Miss Burney traced some likeness even in his dress. In the later part of the *Life* we meet phrases in which Boswell is evidently aping the true Johnsonian style. So, for example, when somebody distinguishes between "moral" and "physical necessity;" Boswell exclaims, "Alas, sir, they come both to the same thing. You may be as hard bound by chains when covered by leather, as when the iron appears." But he specially emulates the profound melancholy of his hero. He seems to have taken pride in his sufferings from hypochondria; though, in truth, his melancholy diverges from Johnson's by as great a difference as that which divides any two varieties in Jaques's classification. Boswell's was the melancholy of a man who spends too much, drinks too much, falls in love too often, and is forced to live in the country in dependence upon a stern old parent, when he is longing for a jovial life in London taverns. Still he was excusably vexed when Johnson refused to believe in the reality of his complaints, and showed scant

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\* The story is often told how Boswell appeared at the Stratford Jubilee with "Corsica Boswell" in large letters on his hat. The account, given apparently by himself, is sufficiently amusing, but the statement is not quite fair. Boswell not unnaturally appeared at a masquerade in the dress of a Corsican chief, and the inscription on his hat seems to have been "Viva la Liberta."

sympathy to his noisy would-be fellow-sufferer. Some of Boswell's freaks were, in fact, very trying. Once he gave up writing letters for a long time, to see whether Johnson would be induced to write first. Johnson became anxious, though he half guessed the truth, and in reference to Boswell's confession gave his disciple a piece of his mind. "Remember that all tricks are either knavish or childish, and that it is as foolish to make experiments upon the constancy of a friend as upon the chastity of a wife."

In other ways Boswell was more successful in aping his friend's peculiarities. When in company with Johnson, he became delightfully pious. "My dear sir," he exclaimed once with unrestrained fervour, "I would fain be a good man, and I am very good now. I fear God and honour the king; I wish to do no ill and to be benevolent to all mankind." Boswell hopes, "for the felicity of human nature," that many experience this mood; though Johnson judiciously suggested that he should not trust too much to impressions. In some matters Boswell showed a touch of independence by outvying the Johnsonian prejudices. He was a warm admirer of feudal principles, and especially held to the propriety of entailing property upon heirs male. Johnson had great difficulty in persuading him to yield to his father's wishes, in a settlement of the estate which contravened this theory. But Boswell takes care to declare that his opinion was not shaken. "Yet let me not be thought," he adds, "harsh or unkind to daughters; for my notion is that they should be treated with great affection and tenderness, and always participate of the prosperity of the family." His estimate of female rights is indicated in another phrase. When Mrs. Knowles, the Quaker, expressed a hope that the sexes would be equal in another world, Boswell replied, "That is too ambitious, madam. We might as well desire to be equal with the angels." Boswell, again, differed from Johnson—who, in spite of his love of authority, had a righteous hatred for all recognized tyranny—by advocating the slave-trade. To abolish that trade would, he says, be robbery of the masters and cruelty to the African savages. Nay, he declares, to abolish it would be

To shut the gates of mercy on mankind!

Boswell was, according to Johnson, "the best travelling companion in the world." In fact, for such purposes, unfailing good-humour and readiness to make talk at all hazards are high recommendations. "If, sir, you were shut up in a castle and a new-born baby with you, what would you do?" is one of his questions to Johnson,—*à propos* of nothing. That is exquisitely ludicrous, no doubt; but a man capable of preferring such a remark to silence helps at any rate to keep the ball rolling. A more objectionable trick was his habit not only of asking preposterous or indiscreet questions, but of setting people by the ears out of sheer curiosity. The appearance of so queer a satel-

lite excited astonishment among Johnson's friends. "Who is this Scotch cur at Johnson's heels?" asked some one. "He is not a cur," replied Goldsmith; "he is only a bur. Tom Davies flung him at Johnson in sport, and he has the faculty of sticking." The bur stuck till the end of Johnson's life. Boswell visited London whenever he could, and soon began taking careful notes of Johnson's talk. His appearance, when engaged in this task long afterwards, is described by Miss Burney. Boswell, she says, concentrated his whole attention upon his idol, not even answering questions from others. When Johnson spoke, his eyes goggled with eagerness; he leant his ear almost on the Doctor's shoulder; his mouth dropped open to catch every syllable; and he seemed to listen even to Johnson's breathings as though they had some mystical significance. He took every opportunity of edging himself close to Johnson's side even at meal-times, and was sometimes ordered imperiously back to his place like a faithful but over-obtrusive spaniel.

It is hardly surprising that Johnson should have been touched by the fidelity of this queer follower. Boswell, modestly enough, attributes Johnson's easy welcome to his interest in all manifestations of the human mind, and his pleasure in an undisguised display of its workings. The last pleasure was certainly to be obtained in Boswell's society. But in fact Boswell, though his qualities were too much those of the ordinary "good fellow," was not without virtues, and still less without remarkable talents. He was, to all appearance, a man of really generous sympathies, and capable of appreciating proofs of a warm heart and a vigorous understanding. Foolish, vain and absurd in every way, he was yet a far kindlier and more genuine man than many who laughed at him. His singular gifts as an observer could only escape notice from a careless or inexperienced reader. Boswell has a little of the true Shaksperian secret. He lets his characters show themselves without obtruding unnecessary comment. He never misses the point of a story, though he does not ostentatiously call our attention to it. He gives just what is wanted to indicate character, or to explain the full meaning of a repartee. It is not till we compare his reports with those of less skilful hearers, that we can appreciate the skill with which the essence of a conversation is extracted, and the whole scene indicated by a few telling touches. We are tempted to fancy that we have heard the very thing, and rashly infer that Boswell was simply the mechanical transmitter of the good things uttered. Any one who will try to put down the pith of a brilliant conversation within the same space, may soon satisfy himself of the absurdity of such an hypothesis, and will learn to appreciate Boswell's powers not only of memory but artistic representation. Such a feat implies not only admirable quickness of appreciation, but a rare literary faculty. Boswell's accuracy is remarkable; but it is the least part of his merit,



The book which so faithfully reflects the peculiarities of its hero and its author became the first specimen of a new literary type. Johnson himself was a master in one kind of biography; that which sets forth a condensed and vigorous statement of the essentials of a man's life and character. Other biographers had given excellent memoirs of men considered in relation to the chief historical currents of the time. But a full-length portrait of a man's domestic life with enough picturesque detail to enable us to see him through the eyes of private friendship did not exist in the language. Boswell's originality and merit may be tested by comparing his book to the ponderous performance of Sir John Hawkins, or to the dreary dissertations, falsely called lives, of which Dugald Stewart's *Life of Robertson* may be taken for a type. The writer is so anxious to be dignified and philosophical that the despairing reader seeks in vain for a single vivid touch, and discovers even the main facts of the hero's life by some indirect allusion. Boswell's example has been more or less followed by innumerable successors; and we owe it in some degree to his example that we have such delightful books as Lockhart's *Life of Scott* or Mr. Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*. Yet no later biographer has been quite as fortunate in a subject; and Boswell remains as not only the first, but the best of his class.

One special merit implies something like genius. Macaulay has given to the usual complaint which distorts the vision of most biographers the name of *lues Boswelliana*. It is true that Boswell's adoration of his hero is a typical example of the feeling. But that which distinguishes Boswell, and renders the phrase unjust, is that in him adoration never hindered accuracy of portraiture. "I will not make my tiger a cat to please anybody," was his answer to well-meaning entreaties of Hannah More to soften his accounts of Johnson's asperities. He saw instinctively that a man who is worth anything loses far more than he gains by such posthumous flattery. The whole picture is toned down, and the lights are depressed as well as the shadows. The truth is that it is unscientific to consider a man as a bundle of separate good and bad qualities, of which one half may be concealed without injury to the rest. Johnson's fits of bad temper, like Goldsmith's blundering, must be unsparingly revealed by a biographer, because they are in fact expressions of the whole character. It is necessary to take them into account in order really to understand either the merits or the shortcomings. When they are softened or omitted, the whole story becomes an enigma, and we are often tempted to substitute some less creditable explanation of errors for the true one. We should not do justice to Johnson's intense tenderness, if we did not see how often it was masked by an irritability pardonable in itself, and not affecting the deeper springs of action. To bring out the beauty of a character by means of its external oddities is the triumph of a kindly humourist; and Boswell would have

acted as absurdly in suppressing Johnson's weaknesses, as Sterne would have done had he made Uncle Toby a perfectly sound and rational person. But to see this required an insight so rare that it is wanting in nearly all the biographers who have followed Boswell's steps, and is the most conclusive proof that Boswell was a man of a higher intellectual capacity than has been generally admitted.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### JOHNSON AS A LITERARY DICTATOR.

WE have now reached the point at which Johnson's life becomes distinctly visible through the eyes of a competent observer. The last twenty years are those which are really familiar to us: and little remains but to give some brief selection of Boswell's anecdotes. The task, however, is a difficult one. It is easy enough to make a selection of the gems of Boswell's narrative; but it is also inevitable that, taken from their setting, they should lose the greatest part of their brilliance. We lose all the quaint semi-conscious touches of character which make the original so fascinating; and Boswell's absurdities become less amusing when we are able to forget for an instant that the perpetrator is also the narrator. The effort, however, must be made; and it will be best to premise a brief statement of the external conditions of the life.

From the time of the pension until his death, Johnson was elevated above the fear of poverty. He had a pleasant refuge at the Thrales's, where much of his time was spent; and many friends gathered round him and regarded his utterances with even excessive admiration. He had still frequent periods of profound depression. His diaries reveal an inner life tormented by gloomy forebodings, by remorse for past indolence and futile resolutions of amendment; but he could always escape from himself to a society of friends and admirers. His abandonment of wine seems to have improved his health and diminished the intensity of his melancholy fits. His literary activity, however, nearly ceased. He wrote a few political pamphlets in defence of Government, and after a long period of indolence managed to complete his last conspicuous work—the *Lives of the Poets*, which was published in 1779 and 1781. One other book of some interest appeared in 1775. It was an account of the journey made with Boswell to the Hebrides in 1773. This journey was in fact the chief interruption to the even tenour of his life. He made a tour to Wales with the Thrales in 1774; and spent a month with them in Paris in 1775. For the rest of the period he lived chiefly in

London or at Streatham, making occasional trips to Lichfield and Oxford, or paying visits to Taylor, Langton, and one or two other friends. It was, however, in the London which he loved so ardently ("a man," he said once, "who is tired of London is tired of life"), that he was chiefly conspicuous. There he talked and drank tea illimitably at his friends' houses, or argued and laid down the law to his disciples collected in a tavern instead of Academic groves. Especially he was in all his glory at the Club, which began its meetings in February, 1764, and was afterwards known as the Literary Club. This Club was founded by Sir Joshua Reynolds, "our Romulus," as Johnson called him. The original members were Reynolds, Johnson, Burke, Nugent, Beauclerk, Langton, Goldsmith, Chamier, and Hawkins. They met weekly at the Turk's Head, in Gerard Street, Soho, at seven o'clock, and the talk generally continued till a late hour. The Club was afterwards increased in numbers, and the weekly supper changed to a fortnightly dinner. It continued to thrive, and election to it came to be as great an honour in certain circles as election to a membership of Parliament. Among the members elected in Johnson's lifetime were Percy of the *Reliques*, Garrick, Sir W. Jones, Boswell, Fox, Steevens, Gibbon, Adam Smith, the Wartons, Sheridan, Dunning, Sir Joseph Banks, Windham, Lord Stowell, Malone, and Dr. Burney. What was best in the conversation at the time was doubtless to be found at its meetings.

Johnson's habitual mode of life is described by Dr. Maxwell, one of Boswell's friends, who made his acquaintance in 1754. Maxwell generally called upon him about twelve, and found him in bed or declaiming over his tea. A levée, chiefly of literary men, surrounded him; and he seemed to be regarded as a kind of oracle to whom every one might resort for advice or instruction. After talking all the morning, he dined at a tavern, staying late and then going to some friend's house for tea, over which he again loitered for a long time. Maxwell is puzzled to know when he could have read or written. The answer seems to be pretty obvious; namely, that after the publication of the *Dictionary* he wrote very little, and that, when he did write, it was generally in a brief spasm of feverish energy. One may understand that Johnson should have frequently reproached himself for his indolence; though he seems to have occasionally comforted himself by thinking that he could do good by talking as well as by writing. He said that a man should have a part of his life to himself; and compared himself to a physician retired to a small town from practice in a great city. Boswell, in spite of this, said that he still wondered that Johnson had not more pleasure in writing than in not writing. "Sir," replied the oracle, "you *may* wonder."

I will now endeavour, with Boswell's guidance, to describe a few of the characteristic scenes which can be fully enjoyed in his pages



alone. The first must be the introduction of Boswell to the sage. Boswell had come to London eager for the acquaintance of literary magnates. He already knew Goldsmith, who had inflamed his desire for an introduction to Johnson. Once when Boswell spoke of Levett, one of Johnson's dependents, Goldsmith had said, "He is poor and honest, which is recommendation enough to Johnson." Another time, when Boswell had wondered at Johnson's kindness to a man of bad character, Goldsmith had replied, "He is now become miserable, and that insures the protection of Johnson." Boswell had hoped for an introduction through the elder Sheridan; but Sheridan never forgot the contemptuous phrase in which Johnson had referred to his fellow-pensioner. Possibly Sheridan had heard of one other Johnsonian remark. "Why, sir," he had said, "Sherry is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in Nature." At another time he said, "Sheridan cannot bear me; I bring his declamation to a point." "What influence can Mr. Sheridan have upon the language of this great country by his narrow exertions? Sir, it is burning a farthing candle at Dover to show light at Calais." Boswell, however, was acquainted with Davies, an actor turned bookseller, now chiefly remembered by a line in Churchill's *Rosciad* which is said to have driven him from the stage—

He mouths a sentence as curs mouth a bone.

Boswell was drinking tea with Davies and his wife in their back parlour when Johnson came into the shop. Davies, seeing him through the glass-door, announced his approach to Boswell in the spirit of Horatio addressing Hamlet: "Look, my Lord, it comes!" Davies introduced the young Scotchman, who remembered Johnson's proverbial prejudices. "Don't tell him where I come from!" cried Boswell. "From Scotland," said Davies roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said Boswell, "I do indeed come from Scotland; but I cannot help it!" "That, sir," was the first of Johnson's many retorts to his worshipper, "is what a great many of your countrymen cannot help."

Poor Boswell was stunned; but he recovered when Johnson observed to Davies, "What do you think of Garrick? He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams, because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings." "O, sir," intruded the unlucky Boswell, "I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," replied Johnson sternly, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done, and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." The second blow might have crushed a less intrepid curiosity. Boswell, though silenced, gradually recovered sufficiently to listen, and afterwards to note down parts of the conversation. As the interview went

on, he even ventured to make a remark or two, which were very civilly received; Davies consoled him at his departure by assuring him that the great man liked him very well, "I cannot conceive a more humiliating position," said Beauclerk on another occasion, "than to be clapped on the back by Tom Davies." For the present, however, even Tom Davies was a welcome encourager to one who, for the rest, was not easily rebuffed. A few days afterwards Boswell ventured a call, was kindly received, and detained for some time by "the giant in his den." He was still a little afraid of the said giant, who had shortly before administered a vigorous retort to his countryman Blair. Blair had asked Johnson whether he thought that any man of a modern age could have written *Ossian*. "Yes, sir," replied Johnson, "many men, many women, and many children." Boswell, however, got on very well, and before long had the high honour of drinking a bottle of port with Johnson at the Mitre, and receiving, after a little autobiographical sketch, the emphatic approval, "Give me your hand, I have taken a liking to you."

In a very short time Boswell was on sufficiently easy terms with Johnson, not merely to frequent his levées but to ask him to dinner at the Mitre. He gathered up, though without the skill of his later performances, some fragments of the conversational feast. The great man aimed another blow or two at Scotch prejudices. To an unlucky compatriot of Boswell's, who claimed for his country a great many "noble wild prospects," Johnson replied, "I believe, sir, you have a great many; Norway, too, has noble wild prospects, and Lapland is remarkable for prodigious noble wild prospects. But, sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England." Though Boswell makes a slight remonstrance about the "rude grandeur of Nature" as seen in "Caledonia," he sympathized in this with his teacher. Johnson said afterwards that he never knew any one with "such a gust for London." Before long he was trying Boswell's tastes by asking him in Greenwich Park. "Is not this very fine?" "Yes, sir," replied the promising disciple, "but not equal to Fleet Street." "You are right, sir," said the sage; and Boswell illustrates his dictum by the authority of a "very fashionable baronet, and, moreover, a baronet from Rydal, who declared that the fragrance of a May evening in the country might be very well, but that he preferred the smell of a flambeau at the playhouse. In more serious moods Johnson delighted his new disciple by discussions upon theological, social, and literary topics. He argued with an unfortunate friend of Boswell's, whose mind, it appears, had been poisoned by Hume, and who was, moreover, rash enough to undertake the defence of principles of political equality. Johnson's view of all propagators of new opinions was tolerably simple. "Hume and other sceptical innovators," he said, "are vain men and will gratify themselves at any expense. Truth will not afford

sufficient food to their vanity ; so they have betaken themselves to error. Truth, sir, is a cow which will yield such people no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull." On another occasion, poor Boswell, not yet acquainted with the master's prejudices, quoted with hearty laughter a "very strange" story which Hume had told him of Johnson. According to Hume, Johnson had said that he would stand before a battery of cannon to restore Convocation to its full powers. "And would I not, sir?" thundered out the sage with flashing eyes and threatening gestures. Boswell judiciously bowed to the storm, and diverted Johnson's attention. Another manifestation of orthodox prejudice was less terrible. Boswell told Johnson that he had heard a Quaker woman preach. "A woman's preaching," said Johnson, "is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well ; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

So friendly had the pair become, that when Boswell left England to continue his studies at Utrecht, Johnson accompanied him in the stage-coach to Harwich, amusing him on the way by his frankness of address to fellow-passengers, and by the voracity of his appetite. He gave him some excellent advice, remarking of a moth which fluttered into a candle, "that creature was its own tormentor, and I believe its name was Boswell." He refuted Berkeley by striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it. As the ship put out to sea Boswell watched him from the deck, whilst he remained "rolling his majestic frame in his usual manner." And so the friendship was cemented, though Boswell disappeared for a time from the scene, travelled on the Continent, and visited Paoli in Corsica. A friendly letter or two kept up the connexion till Boswell returned in 1766, with his head full of Corsica and a projected book of travels.

In the next year, 1767, occurred an incident upon which Boswell dwells with extreme complacency. Johnson was in the habit of sometimes reading in the King's Library, and it came into the head of his majesty that he should like to see the uncouth monster upon whom he had bestowed a pension. In spite of his semi-humorous Jacobitism, there was probably not a more loyal subject in his majesty's dominions. Loyalty is a word too often used to designate a sentiment worthy only of valets, advertising tradesmen, and writers of claptrap articles. But it deserves all respect when it reposes, as in Johnson's case, upon a profound conviction of the value of political subordination, and an acceptance of the king as the authorized representative of a great principle. There was no touch of servility in Johnson's respect for his sovereign, a respect fully reconcilable with a sense of his own personal dignity. Johnson spoke of his interview with unfeigned satisfaction, which it would be difficult in these days to preserve from the taint of snobbishness. He described it frequently to his friends, and Boswell with pious care ascertained the details from



Johnson himself, and from various secondary sources. He contrived afterwards to get his minute submitted to the King himself, who graciously authorized its publication. When he was preparing his biography, he published this account with the letter to Chesterfield in a small pamphlet sold at a prohibitory price, in order to secure the copyright.

"I find," said Johnson afterwards, "that it does a man good to be talked to by his sovereign. In the first place a man cannot be in a passion." What other advantages he perceived must be unknown, for here the oracle was interrupted. But whatever the advantages, it could hardly be reckoned amongst them, that there would be room for the hearty cut and thrust retorts which enlivened his ordinary talk. To us accordingly the conversation is chiefly interesting as illustrating what Johnson meant by his politeness. He found that the King wanted him to talk, and he talked accordingly. He spoke in a "firm manly manner, with a sonorous voice," and not in the subdued tone customary at formal receptions. He dilated upon various literary topics, on the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, on some contemporary controversies, on the quack Dr. Hill, and upon the reviews of the day. All that is worth repeating is a complimentary passage which shows Johnson's possession of that courtesy which rests upon sense and self-respect. The King asked whether he was writing anything, and Johnson excused himself by saying that he had told the world what he knew for the present, and had "done his part as a writer." "I should have thought so too," said the King, "if you had not written so well." "No man," said Johnson, "could have paid a higher compliment; and it was fit for a King to pay—it was decisive." When asked if he had replied, he said, "No, sir. When the King had said it, it was to be. It was not for me to bandy civilities with my sovereign." Johnson was not the less delighted. "Sir," he said to the librarian, "they may talk of the King as they will, but he is the finest gentleman I have ever seen." And he afterwards compared his manners to those of Louis XIV., and his favourite, Charles II. Goldsmith, says Boswell, was silent during the narrative, because (so his kind friend supposed) he was jealous of the honour paid to the dictator. But his natural simplicity prevailed. He ran to Johnson, and exclaimed in "a kind of flutter," "Well, you acquitted yourself in this conversation better than I should have done, for I should have bowed and stammered through the whole of it."

The years 1768 and 1769 were a period of great excitement for Boswell. He was carrying on various love affairs, which ended with his marriage in the end of 1769. He was publishing his book upon Corsica and paying homage to Paoli, who arrived in England in the autumn of the same year. The book appeared in the beginning of 1768, and he begs his friend Temple to report all that is said about it, but with the restriction that he is to conceal *all censure*. He particu-

larly wanted Gray's opinion, as Gray was a friend of Temple's. Gray's opinion, not conveyed to Boswell, was expressed by his calling it "a dialogue between a green goose and a hero." Boswell, who was cultivating the society of various eminent people, exclaims triumphantly in a letter to Temple (April 26, 1768), "I am really a great man now." Johnson and Hume had called upon him on the same day, and Garrick, Franklin, and Oglesby also partook of his "admirable dinners and good claret." "This," he says, with the sense that he deserved his honours, "is enjoying the fruit of my labours, and appearing like the friend of Paoli." Johnson in vain expressed a wish that he would "empty his head of Corsica, which had filled it too long." Empty my head of Corsica! Empty it of honour, empty it of friendship, empty it of piety!" exclaims the ardent youth. The next year accordingly saw Boswell's appearance at the Stratford Jubilee, where he paraded to the admiration of all beholders in a costume described by himself (apparently) in a glowing article in the *London Magazine*. "Is it wrong, sir," he took speedy opportunity of inquiring from the oracle, "to affect singularity in order to make people stare?" "Yes, replied Johnson, "if you do it by propagating error, and indeed it is wrong in any way. There is in human nature a general inclination to make people stare, and every wise man has himself to cure of it, and does cure himself. If you wish to make people stare by doing better than others, why make them stare till they stare their eyes out. But consider how easy it is to make people stare by being absurd"—a proposition which he proceeds to illustrate by examples perhaps less telling than Boswell's recent performance.

The sage was less communicative on the question of marriage, though Boswell had anticipated some "intrusive conversation" upon that topic. His sole remark was one from which Boswell "humbly differed." Johnson maintained that a wife was not the worse for being learned. Boswell, on the other hand, defined the proper degree of intelligence to be desired in a female companion by some verses in which Sir Thomas Overbury says that a wife should have some knowledge, and be "by nature wise, not learned much by art." Johnson said afterwards that Mrs. Boswell was in a proper degree inferior to her husband. So far as we can tell she seems to have been a really sensible and good woman, who kept her husband's absurdities in check, and was, in her way, a better wife than he deserved. So, happily, are most wives.

Johnson and Boswell had several meetings in 1769. Boswell had the honour of introducing the two objects of his idolatry, Johnson and Paoli, and on another occasion entertained a party including Goldsmith and Garrick and Reynolds, at his lodgings in Old Bond Street. We can still see the meeting more distinctly than many that have been swallowed by a few days of oblivion. They waited for one of the party, Johnson kindly maintaining that six ought to be kept

waiting for one, if the one would suffer more by the others sitting down than the six by waiting. Meanwhile Garrick "played round Johnson with a fond vivacity, taking hold of the breasts of his coat, looking up in his face with a lively archness," and complimenting him on his good health. Goldsmith strutted about bragging of his dress, of which Boswell, in the serene consciousness of superiority to such weakness, thought him seriously vain. "Let me tell you," said Goldsmith, "when my tailor brought home my bloom-coloured coat, he said, 'Sir, I have a favour to beg of you; when anybody asks you who made your clothes, be pleased to mention John Filby, at the Harrow, Water Lane.'" "Why, sir," said Johnson, "that was because he knew that the strange colour would attract crowds to gaze at it, and thus they might hear of him, and see how well he could make a coat even of so absurd a colour." Mr. Filby has gone the way of all tailors and bloom-coloured coats, but some of his bills are preserved. On the day of this dinner he had delivered to Goldsmith a half-dress suit of ratteen lined with satin, costing twelve guineas, a pair of silk stocking-breeches for £2 5s. and a pair of bloom-coloured ditto for £1 4s. 6d. The bill, including other items, was paid, it is satisfactory to add, in February, 1771.

The conversation was chiefly literary. Johnson repeated the concluding lines of the *Dunciad*; upon which some one (probably Boswell) ventured to say that they were "too fine for such a poem—a poem on what?" "Why," said Johnson, "on dunces! It was worth while being a dunce then. Ah, sir, hadst *thou* lived in those days!" Johnson previously uttered a criticism which has led some people to think that he had a touch of the dunce in him. He declared that a description of a temple in Congreve's *Mourning Bride* was the finest he knew—finer than anything in Shakspeare. Garrick vainly protested; but Johnson was inexorable. He compared Congreve to a man who had only ten guineas in the world, but all in one coin; whereas Shakspeare might have ten thousand separate guineas. The principle of the criticism is rather curious. "What I mean is," said Johnson, "that you can show me no passage where there is simply a description of material objects, without any admixture of moral notions, which produces such an effect." The description of the night before Agincourt was rejected because there were men in it; and the description of Dover Cliff because the boats and the crows "impede your fall." They do "not impress your mind at once with the horrible idea of immense height. The impression is divided; you pass on by computation from one stage of the tremendous space to another."

Probably most people will think that the passage in question deserves a very slight fraction of the praise bestowed upon it; but the criticism, like most of Johnson's, has a meaning which might be worth examining abstractedly from the special application which shocks the idolaters of Shakspeare. Presently the party discussed Mrs. Mon-



tagu, whose Essay upon Shakspeare had made some noise. Johnson had a respect for her, caused in great measure by a sense of her liberality to his friend Miss Williams, of whom more must be said hereafter. He paid her some tremendous compliments, observing that some China plates which had belonged to Queen Elizabeth and to her, had no reason to be ashamed of a possessor so little inferior to the first. But he had his usual professional contempt for her amateur performances in literature. Her defence of Shakspeare against Voltaire did her honour, he admitted, but it would do nobody else honour. "No, sir, there is no real criticism in it : none showing the beauty of thought, as formed on the workings of the human heart." Mrs. Montagu was reported once to have complimented a modern tragedian, probably Jephson, by saying, "I tremble for Shakspeare." "When Shakspeare," said Johnson, "has got Jephson for his rival and Mrs. Montagu for his defender, he is in a poor state indeed." The conversation went on to a recently published book, *Kames's Elements of Criticism*, which Johnson praised, whilst Goldsmith said more truly, "It is easier to write that book than to read it." Johnson went on to speak of other critics. "There is no great merit," he said, "in telling how many plays have ghosts in them, and how this ghost is better than that. You must show how terror is impressed on the human heart. In the description of night in *Macbeth* the beetle and the bat detract from the general idea of darkness—inspissated gloom."

After Boswell's marriage he disappeared for some time from London, and his correspondence with Johnson dropped, as he says, without coldness, from pure procrastination. He did not return to London till 1772. In the spring of that and the following year he renewed his old habits of intimacy, and inquired into Johnson's opinion upon various subjects ranging from ghosts to literary criticism. The height to which he had risen in the doctor's good opinion was marked by several symptoms. He was asked to dine at Johnson's house upon Easter day, 1773 ; and observes that his curiosity was as much gratified as by a previous dinner with Rousseau in the "wilds of Neufchatel." He was now able to report, to the amazement of many inquirers, that Johnson's establishment was quite orderly. The meal consisted of very good soup, a boiled leg of lamb with spinach, a veal pie, and a rice pudding. A stronger testimony of good-will was his election, by Johnson's influence, into the Club. It ought apparently to be said that Johnson forced him upon the Club by letting it be understood that, till Boswell was admitted, no other candidate would have a chance. Boswell, however, was, as his proposer said, a thoroughly "clubable" man, and once a member, his good humour secured his popularity. On the important evening Boswell dined at Beauclerk's with his proposer and some other members. The talk turned upon Goldsmith's merits ; and Johnson not only defended his poetry, but preferred him as a historian to Robertson. Such a judgment could be explained in

Boswell's opinion by nothing but Johnson's dislike to the Scotch. Once before, when Boswell had mentioned Robertson in order to meet Johnson's condemnation of Scotch literature in general, Johnson had evaded him ; " Sir, I love Robertson, and I won't talk of his book." On the present occasion he said that he would give Robertson the advice offered by an old college tutor to a pupil ; " read over your compositions, and whenever you meet with a passage which you think particularly fine, strike it out." A good anecdote of Goldsmith followed. Johnson had said to him once in the Poet's Corner at Westminster,—

Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis.

When they got to Temple Bar Goldsmith pointed to the heads of the Jacobites upon it and slyly suggested,—

Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis.

Johnson next pronounced a critical judgment which should be set against many sins of that kind. He praised the *Pilgrim's Progress* very warmly, and suggested that Bunyan had probably read Spenser.

After more talk the gentlemen went to the Club ; and poor Boswell remained trembling with an anxiety which even the charms of Lady Di Beauclerk's conversation could not dissipate. The welcome news of his election was brought ; and Boswell went to see Burke for the first time, and to receive a humorous charge from Johnson, pointing out the conduct expected from him as a good member. Perhaps some hints were given as to betrayal of confidence. Boswell seems at any rate to have had a certain reserve in repeating Club talk.

This intimacy with Johnson was about to receive a more public and even more impressive stamp. The antipathy to Scotland and the Scotch already noticed was one of Johnson's most notorious crotchets. The origin of the prejudice was forgotten by Johnson himself, though he was willing to accept a theory started by old Sheridan that it was resentment for the betrayal of Charles I. There is, however, nothing surprising in Johnson's partaking a prejudice common enough from the days of his youth, when each people supposed itself to have been cheated by the Union, and Englishmen resented the advent of swarms of needy adventurers, talking with a strange accent and hanging together with honourable but vexatious persistence. Johnson was irritated by what was, after all, a natural defence against English prejudice. He declared that the Scotch were always ready to lie on each other's behalf. " The Irish," he said, " are not in a conspiracy to cheat the world by false representations of the merits of their countrymen. No, sir, the Irish are a fair people ; they never speak well of one another." There was another difference. He always expressed a generous resentment against the tyranny exercised by English rulers

over the Irish people. To some one who defended the restriction of Irish trade for the good of English merchants, he said, "Sir, you talk the language of a savage. What! sir, would you prevent any people from feeding themselves, if by any honest means they can do it?" It was "better to hang or drown people at once," than weaken them by unrelenting persecution. He felt some tenderness for Catholics, especially when oppressed, and a hearty antipathy towards prosperous Presbyterians. The Lowland Scotch were typified by John Knox, in regard to whom he expressed a hope, after viewing the ruins of St. Andrew's, that he was buried "in the highway."

This sturdy British and High Church prejudice did not prevent the worthy doctor from having many warm friendships with Scotchmen, and helping many distressed Scotchmen in London. Most of the amanuenses employed for his *Dictionary* were Scotch. But he nourished the prejudice the more as giving an excellent pretext for many keen gibes. "Scotch learning," he said, for example, "is like bread in a besieged town. Every man gets a mouthful, but no man a bellyful." Once Strahan said in answer to some abusive remarks, "Well, sir, God made Scotland." "Certainly," replied Johnson, "but we must always remember that He made it for Scotchmen; and comparisons are odious, Mr. Strahan, but God made hell."

Boswell, therefore, had reason to feel both triumph and alarm when he induced the great man to accompany him in a Scotch tour. Boswell's journal of the tour appeared soon after Johnson's death. Johnson himself wrote an account of it, which is not without interest, though it is in his dignified style, which does not condescend to Boswellian touches of character. In 1773 the Scotch Highlands were still a little known region, justifying a book descriptive of manners and customs, and touching upon antiquities now the commonplaces of innumerable guide books. Scott was still an infant, and the day of enthusiasm, real or affected, for mountain scenery had not yet dawned. Neither of the travellers, as Boswell remarks, cared much for "rural beauties." Johnson says quaintly on the shores of Loch Ness, "It will very readily occur that this uniformity of barrenness can afford very little amusement to the traveller; that it is easy to sit at home and conceive rocks and heath and waterfalls; and that these journeys are useless labours, which neither impregnate the imagination nor enlarge the understanding." And though he shortly afterwards sits down on a bank "such as a writer of romance might have delighted to feign," and there conceived the thought of his book, he does not seem to have felt much enthusiasm. He checked Boswell for describing a hill as "immense," and told him that it was only a "considerable protuberance." Indeed it is not surprising if he sometimes grew weary in long rides upon Highland ponies, or if, when weatherbound in a remote village in Skye, he declared that this was a "waste of life."



On the whole, however, Johnson bore his fatigues well, preserved his temper, and made sensible remarks upon men and things. The pair started from Edinburgh in the middle of August, 1773; they went north along the eastern coast, through St. Andrew's, Aberdeen, Banff, Fort George, and Inverness. There they took to horses, rode to Glenelg, and took boat for Skye, where they landed on the 2nd of September. They visited Rothsay, Col, Mull, and Iona, and after some dangerous sailing got to the mainland at Oban on October 2nd. Thence they proceeded by Inverary and Loch Lomond to Glasgow; and after paying a visit to Boswell's paternal mansion at Auchinleck in Ayrshire, returned to Edinburgh in November. It were too long to narrate their adventures at length or to describe in detail how Johnson grieved over traces of the iconoclastic zeal of Knox's disciples, seriously investigated stories of second-sight, cross-examined and brow-beat credulous believers in the authenticity of *Ossian*, and felt his piety grow warm among the ruins of Iona. Once or twice, when the temper of the travellers was tried by the various worries incident to their position, poor Boswell came in for some severe blows. But he was happy, feeling, as he remarks, like a dog who has run away with a large piece of meat, and is devouring it peacefully in a corner by himself. Boswell's spirits were irrepressible. On hearing a drum beat for dinner at Fort George, he says, with a Pepys-like touch, "I for a little while fancied myself a military man, and it pleased me." He got scandalously drunk on one occasion, and showed reprehensible levity on others. He bored Johnson by inquiring too curiously into his reasons for not wearing a nightcap—a subject which seems to have interested him profoundly; he permitted himself to say in his journal that he was so much pleased with some pretty ladies' maids at the Duke of Argyll's, that he felt he could "have been a knight-errant for them," and his "venerable fellow-traveller" read the passage without censuring his levity. The great man himself could be equally volatile. "*I have often thought,*" he observed one day, to Boswell's amusement, "that if I kept a seraglio, the ladies should all wear linen gowns"—as more cleanly. The pair agreed in trying to stimulate the feudal zeal of various Highland chiefs with whom they came in contact, and who were unreasonable enough to show a hankering after the luxuries of civilization.

Though Johnson seems to have been generally on his best behaviour, he had a rough encounter or two with some of the more civilized natives. Boswell piloted him safely through a visit to Lord Monboddo, a man of real ability, though the proprietor of crochets as eccentric as Johnson's, and consequently divided from him by strong mutual prejudices. At Auchinleck he was less fortunate. The old laird, who was the staunchest of Whigs, had not relished his son's hero-worship. "There is nae hope for Jamie, mon; Jamie is gaen clean gyte. What do you think, mon? He's done wi' Paoli—he's off

wi' the land-louping scoundrel of a Corsican, and who's tail do you think he's pinned himself to now, mon?" "Here," says Sir Walter Scott, the authority for the story; "the old judge summoned up a sneer of most sovereign contempt. 'A dominie, mon—an auld dominie—he kepted a schule and caould it an acaademy.'" The two managed to keep the peace till, one day during Johnson's visit, they got upon Oliver Cromwell. Boswell suppresses the scene with obvious reluctance, his openness being checked for once by filial respect. Scott has fortunately preserved the climax of Old Boswell's argument. "What had Cromwell done for his country?" asked Johnson. "God, doctor, he gart Kings ken that they had a *lith* in their necks," retorted the laird, in a phrase worthy of Mr. Carlyle himself. Scott reports one other scene, at which respectable commentators, like Croker, hold up their hands in horror. Should we regret or rejoice to say that it involves an obvious inaccuracy? The authority, however, is too good to allow us to suppose that it was without some foundation. Adam Smith, it is said, met Johnson at Glasgow and had an altercation with him about the well-known account of Hume's death. As Hume did not die till three years later, there must be some error in this. The dispute, however, whatever its date or subject, ended by Johnson to Smith, "*you lie*." "And what did you reply?" was asked of Smith. "I said, 'you are a son of a ——.'" "On such terms," says Scott, "did these two great moralists meet and part, and such was the classical dialogue between these two great teachers of morality."

In the year 1774 Boswell found it expedient to atone for his long absence in the previous year by staying at home. Johnson managed to complete his account of the *Scotch Tour*, which was published at the end of the year. Among other consequences was a violent controversy with the lovers of *Ossian*. Johnson was a thorough sceptic as to the authenticity of the book. His scepticism did not repose upon the philological or antiquarian reasonings, which would be applicable in the controversy from internal evidence. It was to some extent the expression of a general incredulity which astonished his friends, especially when contrasted with his tenderness for many puerile superstitions. He could scarcely be induced to admit the truth of any narrative which struck him as odd, and it was long, for example, before he would believe even in the Lisbon earthquake. Yet he seriously discussed the truth of second-sight; he carefully investigated the Cock-lane ghost—a goblin who anticipated some of the modern phenomena of so-called "spiritualism," and with almost equal absurdity; he told stories to Boswell about a "shadowy being" which had once been seen by Cave, and declared that he had once heard his mother call "Sam" when he was at Oxford and she at Lichfield. The apparent inconsistency was in truth natural enough. Any man who clings with unreasonable pertinacity to the prejudices

of his childhood, must be alternately credulous and sceptical in excess. In both cases, he judges by his fancies in defiance of evidence; and accepts and rejects according to his likes and dislikes, instead of his estimates of logical proof. *Ossian* would be naturally offensive to Johnson, as one of the earliest and most remarkable manifestations of that growing taste for what was called "Nature," as opposed to civilization, of which Rousseau was the great mouthpiece. Nobody more heartily despised this form of "cant" than Johnson. A man who utterly despised the scenery of the Hebrides as compared with Greenwich Park or Charing Cross, would hardly take kindly to the Ossianesque version of the mountain passion. The book struck him as sheer rubbish. I have already quoted the retort about "many men, many women, and many children." "A man," he said, on another occasion, "might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it."

The precise point, however, upon which he rested his case, was the tangible one of the inability of Macpherson to produce the manuscripts of which he had affirmed the existence. Macpherson wrote a furious letter to Johnson, of which the purport can only be inferred from Johnson's smashing retort,—

"Mr James Macpherson, I have received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat by the menaces of a ruffian.

"What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your *Homer*, are not so formidable, and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard not to what you shall say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

"SAM. JOHNSON."

And so laying in a tremendous cudgel, the old gentleman (he was now sixty-six) awaited the assault, which, however, was not delivered.

In 1775 Boswell again came to London, and renewed some of the Scotch discussions. He attended a meeting of the Literary Club, and found the members disposed to laugh at Johnson's tenderness to the stories about second-sight. Boswell heroically avowed his own belief. "The evidence," he said, "is enough for me, though not for his great mind. What will not fill a quart bottle, will fill a pint bottle. I am filled with belief." "Are you?" said Colman; "then cork it up."

It was during this and the next few years that Boswell laboured most successfully in gathering materials for his book. In 1777 he only met Johnson in the country. In 1779, for some unexplained reason, he was lazy in making notes; in 1780 and 1781 he was absent from London; and in the following year Johnson was visibly de-



clining. The tenour of Johnson's life was interrupted during this period by no remarkable incidents, and his literary activity was not great, although the composition of the *Lives of the Poets* falls between 1777 and 1780. His mind, however, as represented by his talk, was in full vigour. I will take in order of time a few of the passages recorded by Boswell, which may serve for various reasons to afford the best illustration of his character. Yet it may be worth while once more to repeat the warning that such fragments moved from their context must lose most of their charm.

On March 26th (1775), Boswell met Johnson at the house of the publisher, Strahan. Strahan reminded Johnson of a characteristic remark which he had formerly made, that there are "few ways in which a man can be more innocently employed than in getting money." On another occasion Johnson observed with equal truth, if less originality, that cultivating kindness was an important part of life, as well as money-making. Johnson then asked to see a country lad whom he had recommended to Strahan as an apprentice. He asked for five guineas on account, that he might give one to the boy. "Nay, if a man recommends a boy and does nothing for him, it is sad work." A "little, thick short-legged boy" was accordingly brought into the courtyard, whither Johnson and Boswell descended, and the lexicographer bending himself down administered some good advice to the awe-struck lad with "slow and sonorous solemnity," ending by the presentation of the guinea.

In the evening the pair formed part of a corps of party "wits," led by Sir Joshua Reynolds, to the benefit of Mrs. Abington, who had been a frequent model of the painter. Johnson praised Garrick's prologues, and Boswell kindly reported the eulogy to Garrick, with whom he supped at Beaucherk's. Garrick treated him to a mimicry of Johnson, repeating, "with pauses and half-whistling, ' the lines,—

Os homini sublime dedit—cælumque tueri  
Jussit—et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus :

looking downwards, and at the end touching the ground with a contorted gesticulation. Garrick was generally jealous of Johnson's light opinion of him, and used to take off his old master, saying, "Davy has some convivial pleasantry about him, but 'tis a futile fellow."

Next day, at Thrale's, Johnson fell foul of Gray, one of his pet aversions. Boswell denied that Gray was dull in poetry. "Sir," replied Johnson, "he was dull in company, dull in his closet, dull everywhere. He was dull in a new way, and that made people think him great. He was a mechanical poet." He proceeded to say that there were only two good stanzas in the *Elegy*. Johnson's criticism was perverse ; but if we were to collect a few of the judgments passed by contemporaries upon each other, it would be scarcely exceptional

in its want of appreciation. It is rather odd to remark that Gray was generally condemned for obscurity—a charge which seems strangely out of place when he is measured by more recent standards.

A day or two afterwards some one rallied Johnson on his appearance at Mrs. Abington's benefit. "Why did you go?" he asked. "Did you see?" "No, sir." "Did you hear?" "No, sir." "Why, then, sir, did you go?" "Because, sir, she is a favourite of the public; and when the public cares the thousandth part for you that it does for her, I will go to your benefit too."

The day after, Boswell won a bet from Lady Di Beauclerk by venturing to ask Johnson what he did with the orange-peel which he used to pocket. Johnson received the question amicably, but did not clear the mystery. "Then," said Boswell, "the world must be left in the dark. It must be said, he scraped them, and he let them dry, but what he did with them next he never could be prevailed upon to tell." "Nay, sir," replied Johnson, "you should say it more emphatically—he could not be prevailed upon, even by his dearest friends, to tell."

This year Johnson received the degree of LL.D. from Oxford. He had previously (in 1765) received the same honour from Dublin. It is remarkable, however, that familiar as the title has become, Johnson called himself plain Mr. to the end of his days, and was generally so called by his intimates. On April 2nd, at a dinner at Hoole's, Johnson made another assault upon Gray and Mason. When Boswell said that there were good passages in Mason's *Elfrida*, he conceded that there were "now and then some good imitations of Milton's bad manner." After some more talk, Boswell spoke of the cheerfulness of Fleet Street. "Why, sir," said Johnson, "Fleet Street has a very animated appearance, but I think that the full tide of human existence is at Charing Cross." He added a story of an eminent tallow-chandler who had made a fortune in London, and was foolish enough to retire to the country. He grew so tired of his retreat, that he begged to know the melting days of his successor, that he might be present at the operation.

On April 7th, they dined at a tavern, where the talk turned upon *Ossian*. Some one mentioned as an objection to its authenticity that no mention of wolves occurred in it. Johnson fell into a reverie upon wild beasts, and, whilst Reynolds and Langton were discussing something, he broke out, "Pennant tells of bears." What Pennant told is unknown. The company continued to talk, whilst Johnson continued his monologue, the word "bear" occurring at intervals, like a word in a catch. At last, when a pause came, he was going on: "We are told that the black bear is innocent, but I should not like to trust myself with him." Gibbon muttered in a low tone, "I should not like to trust myself with *you*"—a prudent resolution, says honest Boswell, who hated Gibbon, if it referred to a competition of abilities.

The talk went on to patriotism, and Johnson laid down an apophthegm, at "which many will start," many people, in fact, having little sense of humour. Such persons may be reminded for their comfort that at this period patriot had a technical meaning. "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." On the 10th of April, he laid down another dogma, calculated to offend the weaker brethren. He defended Pope's line—

Man never *is* but always *to be* blest.

And being asked if a man did not sometimes enjoy a momentary happiness, replied, "Never, but when he is drunk." It would be useless to defend these and other such utterances to any one who cannot enjoy them without defence.

On April 11th, the pair went in Reynolds's coach to dine with Cambridge, at Twickenham. Johnson was in high spirits. He remarked, as they drove down, upon the rarity of good humour in life. One friend mentioned by Boswell was, he said, *acid*, and another *muddy*. At last, stretching himself and turning with complacency, he observed, "I look upon myself as a good-humoured fellow"—a bit of self-esteem against which Boswell protested. Johnson, he admitted, was good natured; but was too irascible and impatient to be good-humoured. On reaching Cambridge's house, Johnson ran to look at the books. "Mr. Johnson," said Cambridge politely, "I am going with your pardon to accuse myself, for I have the same custom which I perceive you have. But it seems odd that one should have such a desire to look at the backs of books." "Sir," replied Johnson, wheeling about at the words, "the reason is very plain. Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it. When we inquire into any subject, the first thing we have to do is to know what books have treated of it. This leads us to look at catalogues, and the backs of books in libraries."

A pleasant talk followed. Johnson denied the value attributed to historical reading, on the ground that we know very little except a few facts and dates. All the colouring, he said, was conjectural. Boswell chuckles over the reflection that Gibbon, who was present, did not take up the cudgels for his favourite study, though the first-fruits of his labours were to appear in the following year. "Probably he did not like to trust himself with Johnson."

The conversation presently turned upon the *Beggar's Opera*, and Johnson sensibly refused to believe that any man had been made a rogue by seeing it. Yet the moralist felt bound to utter some condemnation of such a performance, and at last, amidst the smothered amusement of the company, collected himself to give a heavy stroke: "There is in it," he said, "such a *labefactation* of all principles as may be dangerous to morality."

A discussion followed as to whether Sheridan was right for refusing



to allow his wife to continue as a public singer. Johnson defended him "with all the high spirit of a Roman senator." "He resolved wisely and nobly, to be sure. He is a brave man. Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife sing publicly for hire? No, sir, there can be no doubt here. I know not if I should not prepare myself for a public singer as readily as let my wife be one."

The stout old supporter of social authority went on to denounce the politics of the day. He asserted that politics had come to mean nothing but the art of rising in the world. He contrasted the absence of any principles with the state of the national mind during the stormy days of the seventeenth century. This gives the pith of Johnson's political prejudices. He hated Whigs blindly from his cradle; but he justified his hatred on the ground that they were now all "bottomless Whigs," that is to say, that pierce where you would, you came upon no definite creed, but only upon hollow formulæ, intended as a cloak for private interest. If Burke and one or two of his friends be excepted, the remark had but too much justice.

In 1776, Boswell found Johnson rejoicing in the prospect of a journey to Italy with the Thrales. Before starting he was to take a trip to the country, in which Boswell agreed to join. Boswell gathered up various bits of advice before their departure. One seems to have commended itself to him as specially available for practice. "A man who had been drinking freely," said the moralist, "should never go into a new company. He would probably strike them as ridiculous, though he might be in unison with those who had been drinking with him." Johnson propounded another favourite theory. "A ship," he said, "was worse than a gaol. There is in a gaol better air, better company, better conveniency of every kind; and a ship has the additional disadvantage of being in danger."

On March 19th, they went by coach to the Angel at Oxford; and next morning visited the Master of University College, who chose with Boswell to act in opposition to a very sound bit of advice given by Johnson soon afterwards—perhaps with some reference to the proceeding. "Never speak of a man in his own presence; it is always indelicate and may be offensive." The two, however, discussed Johnson without reserve. The Master said that he would have given Johnson a hundred pounds for a discourse on the British Constitution; and Boswell suggested that Johnson should write two volumes of no great bulk upon Church and State, which should comprise the whole substance of the argument. "He should erect a fort on the confines of each." Johnson was not unnaturally displeased with the dialogue, and growled out, "Why should I be always writing?"

Presently, they went to see Dr. Adams, the Doctor's old friend, who had been answering Hume. Boswell, who had done his best to court the acquaintance of Voltaire, Rousseau, Wilkes, and Hume himself, felt it desirable to reprove Adams for having met Hume

with civility. He aired his admirable sentiments in a long speech, observing upon the connexion between theory and practice, and remarking, by way of practical application, that, if an infidel were at once vain and ugly, he might be compared to "Cicero's beautiful image of Virtue"—which would, as he seems to think, be a crushing retort. Boswell always delighted in fighting with his gigantic backer close behind him. Johnson, as he had doubtless expected, chimed in with the argument. "You should do your best," said Johnson, "to diminish the authority, as well as dispute the arguments of your adversary, because most people are biased more by personal respect than by reasoning." "You would not jostle a chimney-sweeper," said Adams. "Yes," replied Johnson, "if it were necessary to jostle him down."

The pair proceeded by post-chaise past Blenheim, and dined at a good inn at Chapelhouse. Johnson boasted of the superiority, long since vanished if it ever existed, of English to French inns, and quoted with great emotion Shenstone's lines—

Who'er has travell'd life's dull round,  
Where'er his stages may have been,  
Must sigh to think he still has found  
The warmest welcome at an inn.

As they drove along rapidly in the post-chaise, he exclaimed, "Life has not many better things than this." On another occasion he said that he should like to spend his life driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman, clever enough to add to the conversation. The pleasure was partly owing to the fact that his deafness was less troublesome in a carriage. But he admitted that there were drawbacks even to this pleasure. Boswell asked him whether he would not add a post-chaise journey to the other sole cause of happiness—namely, drunkenness. "No, sir," said Johnson, "you are driving rapidly *from* something or *to* something."

They went to Birmingham, where Boswell pumped Hector about Johnson's early days, and saw the works of Boulton, Watt's partner, who said to him, "I sell here, sir, what all the world desires to have—*power*." Thence they went to Lichfield, and met more of the rapidly thinning circle of Johnson's oldest friends. Here Boswell was a little scandalized by Johnson's warm exclamation on opening a letter—"One of the most dreadful things that has happened in my time!" This turned out to be the death of Thrale's only son. Boswell thought the phrase too big for the event, and was some time before he could feel a proper concern. He was, however, "curious to observe how Dr. Johnson would be affected," and was again a little scandalized by the reply to the consolatory remark that the Thrales still had daughters. "Sir," said Johnson, "don't you know how you yourself think? Sir, he wishes to propagate his name." The great man was actually

putting the family sentiment of a brewer in the same category with the sentiments of the heir of Auchinleck. Johnson, however, calmed down, but resolved to hurry back to London. They stayed a night at Taylor's, who remarked that he had fought a good many battles for a physician, one of their common friends. "But you should consider, sir," said Johnson, "that by every one of your victories he is a loser; for every man of whom you get the better will be very angry, and resolve not to employ him, whereas if people get the better of you in argument about him, they will think 'We'll send for Dr. ——— nevertheless!'"

It was after their return to London that Boswell won the greatest triumph of his friendship. He carried through a negotiation, to which, as Burke pleasantly said, there was nothing equal in the whole history of the *corps diplomatique*. At some moment of enthusiasm it had occurred to him to bring Johnson into company with Wilkes. The infidel demagogue was probably in the mind of the Tory High Churchman, when he threw out that pleasant little apophthegm about patriotism. To bring together two such opposites without provoking a collision would be the crowning triumph of Boswell's curiosity. He was ready to run all hazards, as a chemist might try some new experiment at the risk of a destructive explosion; but being resolved, he took every precaution with admirable foresight.

Boswell had been invited by the Dillys, well-known booksellers of the day, to meet Wilkes. "Let us have Johnson," suggested the gallant Boswell. "Not for the world!" exclaimed Dilly. But, on Boswell's undertaking the negotiation, he consented to the experiment. Boswell went off to Johnson and politely invited him in Dilly's name. "I will wait upon him," said Johnson. "Provided, sir, I suppose," said the diplomatic Boswell, "that the company which he is to have is agreeable to you." "What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed Johnson. "What do you take me for? Do you think I am so ignorant of the world as to prescribe to a gentleman what company he is to have at his table?" Boswell worked the point a little farther, till, by judicious manipulation, he had got Johnson to commit himself to meeting anybody—even Jack Wilkes, to make a wild hypothesis—at the Dillys's table. Boswell retired, hoping to think that he had fixed the discussion in Johnson's mind.

The great day arrived, and Boswell, like a consummate general who leaves nothing to chance, went himself to fetch Johnson to the dinner. The great man had forgotten the engagement, and was "buffeting his books" in a dirty shirt and amidst clouds of dust. When reminded of his promise, he said that he had ordered dinner at home with Mrs. Williams. Entreaties of the warmest kind from Boswell softened the peevish old lady, to whose pleasure Johnson had referred him. Boswell flew back, announced Mrs. Williams's consent, and Johnson roared, "Frank, a clean shirt!" and was soon in a hackney-coach.



Boswell rejoiced like a "fortune-hunter who has got an heiress into a post-chaise with him to set out for Gretna Green." Yet the joy was with trembling. Arrived at Dilly's, Johnson found himself amongst strangers, and Boswell watched anxiously from a corner. "Who is that gentleman?" whispered Johnson to Dilly. "Mr. Arthur Lee." Johnson whistled "too-too-too" doubtfully, for Lee was a patriot and an American. "And who is the gentleman in lace?" "Mr. Wilkes, sir." Johnson subsided into a window-seat and fixed his eye on a book. He was fairly in the toils. His reproof of Boswell was recent enough to prevent him from exhibiting his displeasure, and he resolved to restrain himself.

At dinner Wilkes, placed next to Johnson, took up his part in the performance. He pacified the sturdy moralist by delicate attentions to his needs. He helped him carefully to some fine veal. "Pray give me leave, sir; it is better here—a little of the brown—some fat, sir—a little of the stuffing—some gravy—let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter. Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange; or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest." "Sir, sir," cried Johnson, "I am obliged to you, sir," bowing and turning to him, with a look for some time of "surly virtue," and soon of complacency.

Gradually the conversation became cordial. Johnson told of the fascination exercised by Foote, who, like Wilkes, had succeeded in pleasing him against his will. Foote once took to selling beer, and it was so bad that the servants of Fitzherbert, one of his customers, resolved to protest. They chose a little black boy to carry their remonstrance; but the boy waited at table one day when Foote was present, and returning to his companions, said, "This is the finest man I have ever seen. I will not deliver your message; I will drink his beer." From Foote the transition was easy to Garrick, whom Johnson, as usual, defended against the attacks of others. He maintained that Garrick's reputation for avarice, though unfounded, had been rather useful than otherwise. "You despise a man for avarice, but you do not hate him." The clamour would have been more effectual, had it been directed against his living with splendour too great for a player. Johnson went on to speak of the difficulty of getting biographical information. When he had wished to write a life of Dryden, he applied to two living men who remembered him. One could only tell him that Dryden had a chair by the fire at Will's Coffee-house in winter, which was moved to the balcony in summer. The other (Cibber) could only report that he remembered Dryden as a "decent old man, arbiter of critical disputes at Will's."

Johnson and Wilkes had one point in common—a vigorous prejudice against the Scotch, and upon this topic they cracked their jokes in friendly emulation. When they met upon a later occasion (1781), they still pursued this inexhaustible subject. Wilkes told how a privateer had completely plundered seven Scotch islands and re-em-

barked with three and sixpence. Johnson now remarked in answer to somebody who said, "Poor old England is lost!" "Sir, it is not so much to be lamented that old England is lost, as that the Scotch have found it." "You must know, sir," he said to Wilkes, "that I lately took my friend Boswell and showed him genuine civilized life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Lichfield, that he might see for once real civility, for you know he lives among savages in Scotland and among rakes in London." "Except," said Wilkes, "when he is with grave, sober, decent people like you and me." "And we ashamed of him," added Johnson, smiling.

Boswell had to bear some jokes against himself and his countrymen from the pair; but he had triumphed, and rejoiced greatly when he went home with Johnson, and heard the great man speak of his pleasant dinner to Mrs. Williams. Johnson seems to have been permanently reconciled to his foe. "Did we not hear so much said of Jack Wilkes," he remarked next year, "we should think more highly of his conversation. Jack has a great variety of talk, Jack is a scholar, and Jack has the manners of a gentleman. But, after hearing his name sounded from pole to pole as the phoenix of convivial felicity, we are disappointed in his company. He has always been at *me*, but I would do Jack a kindness rather than not. The contest is now over."

In fact, Wilkes had ceased to play any part in public life. When Johnson met him next (in 1781) they joked about such dangerous topics as some of Wilkes's political performances. Johnson sent him a copy of the *Lives*, and they were seen conversing *tête-à-tête* in confidential whispers about George II. and the King of Prussia. To Boswell's mind it suggested the happy days when the lion should lie down with the kid, or, as Dr. Barnard suggested, the goat.

In the year 1777 Johnson began the *Lives of the Poets*, in compliance with a request from the booksellers, who wished for prefaces to a large collection of English poetry. Johnson asked for this work the extremely modest sum of 200 guineas, when he might easily, according to Malone, have received 1000 or 1500. He did not meet Boswell till September, when they spent ten days together at Dr. Taylor's. The subject which specially interested Boswell at this time was the fate of the unlucky Dr. Dodd, hanged for forgery in the previous June. Dodd seems to have been a worthless charlatan of the popular preacher variety. His crime would not in our day have been thought worthy of so severe a punishment; but his contemporaries were less shocked by the fact of death being inflicted for such a fault, than by the fact of its being inflicted on a clergyman. Johnson exerted himself to procure a remission of sentence by writing various letters and petitions on Dodd's behalf. He seems to have been deeply moved by the man's appeal, and could "not bear the thought" that any negligence of his should lead to the death of a fellow-creature; but he

said that if he had himself been in authority he would have signed the death warrant, and for the man himself he had as little respect as might be. He said, indeed, that Dodd was right in not joining in the "cant" about leaving a wretched world. "No, no," said the poor rogue, "it has been a very agreeable world to me." Dodd had allowed to pass for his own one of the papers composed for him by Johnson, and the Doctor was not quite pleased. When, however, Seward expressed a doubt as to Dodd's power of writing so forcibly, Johnson felt bound not to expose him. "Why should you think so? Depend upon it, sir, when any man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." On another occasion, Johnson expressed a doubt himself as to whether Dodd had really composed a certain prayer on the night before his execution. "Sir, do you think that a man the night before he is to be hanged cares for the succession of the royal family, though he *may* have composed the prayer then? A man who has been canting all his life may cant to the last; and yet a man who has been refused a pardon after so much petitioning, would hardly be praying thus fervently for the king."

The last day at Taylor's was characteristic. Johnson was very cordial to his disciple, and Boswell fancied that he could defend his master at "the point of his sword." "My regard for you," said Johnson, "is greater almost than I have words to express, but I do not choose to be always repeating it. Write it down in the first leaf of your pocket-book, and never doubt of it again." They became sentimental, and talked of the misery of human life. Boswell spoke of the pleasures of society. "Alas, sir," replied Johnson, like a true pessimist, "these are only struggles for happiness!" He felt exhilarated, he said, when he first went to Ranelagh, but he changed to the mood of Xerxes weeping at the sight of his army. "It went to my heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think; but that the thoughts of each individual would be distressing when alone." Some years before he had gone with Boswell to the Pantheon and taken a more cheerful view. When Boswell doubted whether there were many happy people present, he said, "Yes, sir, there are many happy people here. There are many people here who are watching hundreds, and who think hundreds are watching them." The more permanent feeling was that which he expressed in the "serene autumn night" in Taylor's garden. He was willing, however, to talk calmly about eternal punishment, and to admit the possibility of a "mitigated interpretation."

After supper he dictated to Boswell an argument in favour of the negro who was then claiming his liberty in Scotland. He hated slavery with a zeal which the excellent Boswell thought to be "without knowledge;" and on one occasion gave as a toast to some "very grave men" at Oxford, "Here's to the next insurrection of negroes in the West Indies." The hatred was combined with as hearty a dislike for



American independence. "How is it," he said, "that we always hear the loudest yelps for liberty amongst the drivers of negroes?" The harmony of the evening was unluckily spoilt by an explosion of this prejudice. Boswell undertook the defence of the colonists, and the discussion became so fierce that though Johnson had expressed a willingness to sit up all night with him, they were glad to part after an hour or two, and go to bed.

In 1778, Boswell came to London and found Johnson absorbed, to an extent which apparently excited his jealousy, by his intimacy with the Thrales. They had, however, several agreeable meetings. One was at the club, and Boswell's report of the conversation is the fullest that we have of any of its meetings. A certain reserve is indicated by his using initials for the interlocutors, of whom, however, one can be easily identified as Burke. The talk began by a discussion of an antique statue, said to be the dog of Alcibiades, and valued at 1000*l*. Burke said that the representation of no animal could be worth so much. Johnson, whose taste for art was a vanishing quantity, said that the value was proportional to the difficulty. A statue, as he argued on another occasion, would be worth nothing if it were cut out of a carrot. Everything, he now said, was valuable which "enlarged the sphere of human powers." The first man who balanced a straw upon his nose, or rode upon three horses at once, deserved the applause of mankind; and so statues of animals should be preserved as a proof of dexterity, though men should not continue such fruitless labours.

The conversation became more instructive under the guidance of Burke. He maintained what seemed to his hearers a paradox, though it would be interesting to hear his arguments from some profounder economist than Boswell, that a country would be made more populous by emigration. "There are bulls enough in Ireland," he remarked incidentally in the course of the argument. "So, sir, I should think from your argument," said Johnson, for once condescending to an irresistible pun. It is recorded, too, that he once made a bull himself, observing that a horse was so slow that when it went up hill, it stood still. If he now failed to appreciate Burke's argument, he made one good remark. Another speaker said that unhealthy countries were the most populous. "Countries which are the most populous," replied Johnson, "have the most destructive diseases. That is the true state of the proposition;" and, indeed, the remark applies to the case of emigration.

A discussion then took place as to whether it would be worth while for Burke to take so much trouble with speeches which never decided a vote. Burke replied that a speech, though it did not gain one vote, would have an influence, and maintained that the House of Commons was not wholly corrupt. "We are all more or less governed by interest," was Johnson's comment. "But interest will not do every-

thing. In a case which admits of doubt, we try to think on the side which is for our interest, and generally bring ourselves to act accordingly. But the subject must admit of diversity of colouring ; it must receive a colour on that side. In the House of Commons there are members enough who will not vote what is grossly absurd and unjust. No, sir, there must always be right enough, or appearance of right, to keep wrong in countenance." After some deviations, the conversation returned to this point. Johnson and Burke agreed on a characteristic statement. Burke said that from his experience he had learnt to think better of mankind. "From my experience," replied Johnson, "I have found them worse on commercial dealings, more disposed to cheat than I had any notion of ; but more disposed to do one another good than I had conceived." "Less just, and more beneficent," as another speaker suggested. Johnson proceeded to say that considering the pressure of want, it was wonderful that men would do so much for each other. The greatest liar is said to speak more truth than falsehood, and perhaps the worst man might do more good than not. But when Boswell suggested that perhaps experience might increase our estimate of human happiness, Johnson returned to his habitual pessimism. "No, sir, the more we inquire, the more we shall find men less happy." The talk soon wandered off into a disquisition upon the folly of deliberately testing the strength of our friend's affection.

The evening ended by Johnson accepting a commission to write to a friend who had given to the Club a hogshead of claret, and to request another, with "a happy ambiguity of expression," in the hopes that it might also be a present.

Some days afterwards, another conversation took place, which has a certain celebrity in Boswellian literature. The scene was at Dilly's, and the guests included Miss Seward and Mrs. Knowles, a well-known Quaker Lady. Before dinner Johnson seized upon a book which he kept in his lap during dinner, wrapped up in the tablecloth. His attention was not distracted from the various business of the hour, but he hit upon a topic which happily combined the two appropriate veins of thought. He boasted that he would write a cookery-book upon philosophical principles, and declared in opposition to Miss Seward that such a task was beyond the sphere of woman. Perhaps this led to a discussion upon the privileges of men, in which Johnson put down Mrs. Knowles, who had some hankering for women's rights, by the Shakespearian maxim that if two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind. Driven from her position in this world, poor Mrs. Knowles hoped that sexes might be equal in the next. Boswell reproved her by the remark already quoted, that men might as well expect to be equal to angels. He enforces this view by an illustration suggested by the "Rev. Mr. Brown of Utrecht," who had observed that a great or small glass might be equally full, though

not holding equal quantities. Mr. Brown intended this for a confutation of Hume, who has said that a little Miss, dressed for a ball, may be as happy as an orator who has won some triumphant success.\*

The conversation thus took a theological turn, and Mrs. Knowles was fortunate enough to win Johnson's high approval. He defended a doctrine maintained by Soame Jenyns, that friendship is not a Christian virtue. Mrs. Knowles remarked that Jesus had twelve disciples, but there was *one* whom he *loved*. Johnson, "with eyes sparkling benignantly," exclaimed, "Very well indeed, madam; you have said very well!"

So far all had gone smoothly; but here, for some inexplicable reason, Johnson burst into a sudden fury against the American rebels, whom he described as "rascals, robbers, pirates," and roared out a tremendous volley, which might almost have been audible across the Atlantic. Boswell sat and trembled, but gradually diverted the sage to less exciting topics. The name of Jonathan Edwards suggested a discussion upon free will and necessity, upon which poor Boswell was much given to worry himself. Some time afterwards Johnson wrote to him, in answer to one of his lamentations: "I hoped you had got rid of all this hypocrisy of misery. What have you to do with liberty and necessity? Or what more than to hold your tongue about it?" Boswell could never take this sensible advice; but he got little comfort from his oracle. "We know that we are all free, and there's an end on't," was his statement on one occasion, and now he could only say, "All theory is against the freedom of the will, and all experience for it."

Some familiar topics followed, which play a great part in Boswell's reports. Among the favourite topics of the sentimentalists of the day was the denunciation of "luxury," and of civilized life in general. There was a disposition to find in the South Sea savages or American Indians an embodiment of the fancied state of nature. Johnson heartily despised the affectation. He was told of an American woman who had to be bound in order to keep her from savage life. "She must have been an animal, a beast," said Boswell. "Sir," said Johnson, "she was a speaking cat." Somebody quoted to him with admiration the soliloquy of an officer who had lived in the wilds of America: "Here am I, free and unrestrained, amidst the rude magnificence of nature; with the Indian woman by my side, and this gun, with which I can procure food when I want it! What more can be desired for human happiness?" "Do not allow yourself, sir," replied Johnson, "to be imposed upon by such gross absurdity. It is sad stuff; it is brutish. If a bull could speak, he might as well

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\* Boswell remarks as a curious coincidence that the same illustration had been used by a Dr. King, a dissenting minister. Doubtless it has been used often enough. For one instance see *Donne's Sermons* (Alford's Edition), vol. i., p. 5.



exclaim, 'Here am I with this cow and this grass; what being can enjoy greater felicity?' When Johnson implored Boswell to "clear his mind of cant," he was attacking his disciple for affecting a serious depression about public affairs; but the cant which he hated would certainly have included as its first article an admiration for the state of nature.

On the present occasion Johnson defended luxury, and said that he had learnt much from Mandeville—a shrewd cynic, in whom Johnson's hatred for humbug is exaggerated into a general disbelief in real as well as sham nobleness of sentiment. As the conversation proceeded, Johnson expressed his habitual horror of death, and caused Miss Seward's ridicule by talking seriously of ghosts and the importance of the question of their reality; and then followed an explosion, which seems to have closed this characteristic evening. A young woman had become a Quaker under the influence of Mrs. Knowles, who now proceeded to deprecate Johnson's wrath at what he regarded as an apostasy. "Madam," he said, "she is an odious wench," and he proceeded to denounce her audacity in presuming to choose a religion for herself. "She knew no more of the points of difference," he said, "than of the difference between the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems." When Mrs. Knowles said that she had the New Testament before her, he said that it was the "most difficult book in the world," and he proceeded to attack the unlucky proselyte with a fury which shocked the two ladies. Mrs. Knowles afterwards published a report of this conversation, and obtained another report, with which, however, she was not satisfied, from Miss Seward. Both of them represent the poor doctor as hopelessly confuted by the mild dignity and calm reason of Mrs. Knowles, though the triumph is painted in far the brightest colours by Mrs. Knowles herself. Unluckily, there is not a trace of Johnson's manner, except in one phrase, in either report, and they are chiefly curious as an indirect testimony to Boswell's superior powers. The passage, in which both the ladies agree, is that Johnson, on the expression of Mrs. Knowles's hope that he would meet the young lady in another world, retorted that he was not fond of meeting fools anywhere.

Poor Boswell was at this time a water-drinker by Johnson's recommendation, though unluckily for himself he never broke off his drinking habits for long. They had a conversation at Paoli's, in which Boswell argued against his present practice. Johnson remarked "that wine gave a man nothing, but only put in motion what had been locked up in frost." It was a key, suggested some one, which opened a box, but the box might be full or empty. "Nay, sir," said Johnson, "conversation is the key, wine is a picklock, which forces open the box and injures it. A man should cultivate his mind, so as to have that confidence and readiness without wine which wine gives." Boswell characteristically said that the great difficulty was from "be-

nevolence." It was hard to refuse "a good, worthy man" who asked you to try his cellar. This, according to Johnson, was mere conceit, implying an exaggerated estimate of your importance to your entertainer. Reynolds gallantly took up the opposite side, and produced the one recorded instance of a Johnsonian blush. "I won't argue any more with you, sir," said Johnson, who thought every man to be elevated who drank wine, "you are too far gone." "I should have thought so indeed, sir, had I made such a speech as you have now done," said Reynolds; and Johnson apologized with the aforesaid blush.

The explosion was soon over on this occasion. Not long afterwards Johnson attacked Boswell so fiercely at a dinner at Reynolds's, that the poor disciple kept away for a week. They made it up when they met next, and Johnson solaced Boswell's wounded vanity by highly commending an image made by him to express his feelings. "I don't care how often or how high Johnson tosses me when only friends are present, for then I fall upon soft ground; but I do not like falling on stones, which is the case when enemies are present." The phrase may recall one of Johnson's happiest illustrations. When some one said in his presence that a *congé d'élire* might be considered as only a strong recommendation. "Sir," replied Johnson, "it is such a recommendation as if I should throw you out of a two-pair of stairs window, and recommend you to fall soft."

It is perhaps time to cease these extracts from Boswell's reports. The next two years were less fruitful. In 1779 Boswell was careless, though twice in London, and in 1780 he did not pay his annual visit. Boswell has partly filled up the gap by a collection of sayings made by Langton, some passages from which have been quoted, and his correspondence gives various details. Garrick died in January of 1779, and Beauclerk in March, 1780. Johnson himself seems to have shown few symptoms of increasing age; but a change was approaching, and the last years of his life were destined to be clouded, not merely by physical weakness, but by a change of circumstances which had great influence upon his happiness.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE CLOSING YEARS OF JOHNSON'S LIFE.

IN following Boswell's guidance we have necessarily seen only one side of Johnson's life; and probably that side which had least significance for the man himself.

Boswell saw in him chiefly the great dictator of conversation; and

though the reports of Johnson's talk represent his character in spite of some qualifications with unusual fulness, there were many traits very inadequately revealed at the Mitre or the Club, at Mrs. Thrale's, or in meetings with Wilkes or Reynolds. We may catch some glimpses from his letters and diaries of that inward life which consisted generally in a long succession of struggles against an oppressive and often paralysing melancholy. Another most noteworthy side to his character is revealed in his relations to persons too humble for admission to the tables at which he exerted a despotic sway. Upon this side Johnson was almost entirely loveable. We often have to regret the imperfection of the records of

That best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love.

Everywhere in Johnson's letters and in the occasional anecdotes, we come upon indications of a tenderness and untiring benevolence which would make us forgive far worse faults than have ever been laid to his charge. Nay, the very asperity of the man's outside becomes endeared to us by the association. His irritability never vented itself against the helpless, and his rough impatience of fanciful troubles implied no want of sympathy for real sorrow. One of Mrs. Thrale's anecdotes is intended to show Johnson's harshness:—"When I one day lamented the loss of a first cousin killed in America, 'Pr'ythee, my dear,' said he, 'have done with canting; how would the world be the worse for it, I may ask, if all your relations were at once spitted like larks and roasted for Presto's supper?' Presto was the dog that lay under the table while we talked." The counter version, given by Boswell is, that Mrs. Thrale related her cousin's death in the midst of a hearty supper, and that Johnson, shocked at her want of feeling, said, "Madam, it would give *you* very little concern if all your relations were spitted like those larks, and roasted for Presto's supper." Taking the most unfavourable version, we may judge how much real indifference to human sorrow was implied by seeing how Johnson was affected by a loss of one of his humblest friends. It is but one case of many. In 1767, he took leave, as he notes in his diary, of his "dear old friend, Catherine Chambers," who had been for about forty-three years in the service of his family. "I desired all to withdraw," he says, "then told her that we were to part for ever, and, as Christians, we should part with prayer, and that I would, if she was willing, say a short prayer beside her. She expressed great desire to hear me, and held up her poor hands as she lay in bed, with great fervour, while I prayed, kneeling by her, in nearly the following words"—which shall not be repeated here—"I then kissed her," he adds. "She told me that to part was the greatest pain that she had ever felt,



and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed, with swelled eyes, and great emotion of kindness, the same hopes. We kissed and parted—I humbly hope to meet again and part no more.”

A man with so true and tender a heart could say serenely, what with some men would be a mere excuse for want of sympathy, that he “hated to hear people whine about metaphysical distresses when there was so much want and hunger in the world.” He had a sound and righteous contempt for all affectation of excessive sensibility. “Suppose,” said Boswell to him, whilst their common friend Baretti was lying under a charge of murder, “that one of your intimate friends were apprehended for an offence for which he might be hanged.” “I should do what I could,” replied Johnson, “to bail him, and give him any other assistance; but if he were once fairly hanged, I should not suffer.” “Would you eat your dinner that day, sir?” asks Boswell. “Yes, sir; and eat it as if he were eating with me. Why, there’s Baretti, who’s to be tried for his life to-morrow. Friends have risen up for him upon every side; yet if he should be hanged, none of them will eat a slice of plum-pudding the less. Sir, that sympathetic feeling goes a very little way in depressing the mind.” Boswell illustrated the subject by saying that Tom Davies had just written a letter to Foote, telling him that he could not sleep from concern about Baretti, and at the same time recommending a young man who kept a pickle-shop. Johnson summed up by the remark: “You will find these very feeling people are not very ready to do you good. They *pay* you by *feeling*.” Johnson never objected to feeling, but to the waste of feeling.

In a similar vein he told Mrs. Thrale that a “surly fellow” like himself had no compassion to spare for “wounds given to vanity and softness,” whilst witnessing the common sight of actual want in great cities. On Lady Tavistock’s death, said to have been caused by grief for her husband’s loss, he observed that her life might have been saved if she had been put into a small chandler’s shop, with a child to nurse. When Mrs. Thrale suggested that a lady would be grieved because her friend had lost the chance of a fortune, “She will suffer as much, perhaps,” he replied, “as your horse did when your cow miscarried.” Mrs. Thrale testifies that he once reproached her sternly for complaining of the dust. When he knew, he said, how many poor families would perish next winter for want of the bread which the drought would deny, he could not bear to hear ladies sighing for rain on account of their complexions or their clothes. While reporting such sayings, she adds, that he loved the poor as she never saw any one else love them, with an earnest desire to make them happy. His charity was unbounded; he proposed to allow himself one hundred a year out of the three hundred of his pension; but the Thrales could never discover that he really spent upon himself more than 70*l.*,

or at most 80%. He had numerous dependants, abroad as well as at home, who "did not like to see him latterly, unless he brought 'em money." He filled his pockets with small cash, which he distributed to beggars in defiance of political economy. When told that the recipients only laid it out upon gin and tobacco, he replied that it was savage to deny them the few coarse pleasures which the richer disdained. Numerous instances are given of more judicious charity. When, for example, a Benedictine monk, whom he had seen in Paris, became a Protestant, Johnson supported him for some months in London, till he could get a living. Once coming home late at night, he found a poor woman lying in the street. He carried her to his house on his back, and found that she was reduced to the lowest stage of want, poverty, and disease. He took care of her at his own charge, with all tenderness, until she was restored to health, and tried to have her put into a virtuous way of living. His house, in his later years, was filled with various waifs and strays, to whom he gave hospitality and sometimes support, defending himself by saying that if he did not help them nobody else would. The head of his household was Miss Williams, who had been a friend of his wife's, and after coming to stay with him, in order to undergo an operation for cataract, became a permanent inmate of his house. She had a small income of some 40% a year, partly from the charity of connexions of her father's, and partly arising from a little book of miscellanies published by subscription. She was a woman of some sense and cultivation, and when she died (in 1783) Johnson said that for thirty years she had been to him as a sister. Boswell's jealousy was excited during the first period of his acquaintance, when Goldsmith one night went home with Johnson, crying "I go to Miss Williams"—a phrase which implied admission to an intimacy from which Boswell was as yet excluded. Boswell soon obtained the coveted privilege, and testifies to the respect with which Johnson always treated the inmates of his family. Before leaving her to dine with Boswell at the hotel, he asked her what little delicacy should be sent to her from the tavern. Poor Miss Williams, however, was peevish, and, according to Hawkins, had been known to drive Johnson out of the room by her reproaches, and Boswell's delicacy was shocked by the supposition that she tested the fullness of cups of tea, by putting her finger inside. We are glad to know that this was a false impression, and, in fact, Miss Williams, however unfortunate in temper and circumstances, seems to have been a lady by manners and education.

The next inmate of this queer household was Robert Levett, a man who had been a waiter at a coffee-house in Paris frequented by surgeons. They had enabled him to pick up some of their art, and he set up as an "obscure practiser in physic amongst the lower people" in London. He took from them such fees as he could get, including provisions, sometimes, unfortunately for him, of the potable kind,

He was once entrapped into a queer marriage, and Johnson had to arrange a separation from his wife. Johnson, it seems, had a good opinion of his medical skill, and more or less employed his services in that capacity. He attended his patron at his breakfast ; breakfasting, said Percy, "on the crust of a roll, which Johnson threw to him after tearing out the crumb." The phrase, it is said, goes too far ; Johnson always took pains that Levett should be treated rather as a friend than as a dependant.

Besides these humble friends, there was a Mrs. Desmoulins, the daughter of a Lichfield physician. Johnson had had some quarrel with the father in his youth for revealing a confession of the mental disease which tortured him from early years. He supported Mrs. Desmoulins none the less, giving house-room to her and her daughter, and making her an allowance of half a-guinea a week, a sum equal to a twelfth part of his pension. Francis Barber has already been mentioned, and we have a dim vision of a Miss Carmichael, who completed what he facetiously called his "seraglio." It was anything but a happy family. He summed up their relations in a letter to Mrs. Thrale. "Williams," he says, "hates everybody ; Levett hates Desmoulins, and does not love Williams ; Desmoulins hates them both ; Poll (Miss Carmichael) loves none of them." Frank Barber complained of Miss Williams's authority, and Miss Williams of Frank's insubordination. Intruders who had taken refuge under his roof brought their children there in his absence, and grumbled if their dinners were ill-dressed. The old man bore it all, relieving himself by an occasional growl, but reproaching any who ventured to join in the growl for their indifference to the sufferings of poverty. Levett died in January, 1782 ; Miss Williams died, after a lingering illness, in 1783, and Johnson grieved in solitude for the loss of his testy companions. A poem, composed upon Levett's death, records his feelings in language which wants the refinement of Goldsmith or the intensity of Cowper's pathos, but which is yet so sincere and tender as to be more impressive than far more elegant compositions. It will be a fitting close to this brief indication of one side of Johnson's character, too easily overlooked in Boswell's pages, to quote part of what Thackeray truly calls the "sacred verses" upon Levett :—

Well tried through many a varying year  
See Levett to the grave descend,  
Officious, innocent, sincere,  
Of every friendless name the friend.

In misery's darkest cavern known,  
His ready help was ever nigh ;  
Where hopeless anguish pour'd his groan,  
And lonely want retired to die,



No summons mock'd by dull delay,  
 No petty gains disdain'd by pride ;  
 The modest wants of every day,  
 The toil of every day supplied.

His virtues walk'd their narrow round,  
 Nor made a pause, nor left a void ;  
 And sure the eternal Master found  
 His single talent well employ'd.

The busy day, the peaceful night,  
 Unfelt, uncounted, glided by ;  
 His frame was firm, his eye was bright,  
 Though now his eightieth year was nigh.

Then, with no throbs of fiery pain,  
 No cold gradations of decay,  
 Death broke at once the vital chain,  
 And freed his soul the easiest way.

The last stanza smells somewhat of the country tombstone ; but to read the whole and to realize the deep, manly sentiment which it implies, without tears in one's eyes, is to me at least impossible.

There is one little touch which may be added before we proceed to the closing years of this tender-hearted old moralist. Johnson loved little children, calling them "little dears," and cramming them with sweetmeats, though we regret to add that he once snubbed a little child rather severely for a want of acquaintance with the *Pilgrim's Progress*. His cat, Hodge, should be famous amongst the lovers of the race. He used to go out and buy oysters for Hodge, that the servants might not take a dislike to the animal from having to serve it themselves. He reproached his wife for beating a cat before the maid, lest she should give a precedent for cruelty. Boswell, who cherished an antipathy to cats, suffered at seeing Hodge scrambling up Johnson's breast, whilst he smiled and rubbed the beast's back and pulled its tail. Boszy remarked that he was a fine cat. "Why, yes, sir," said Johnson ; "but I have had cats whom I liked better than this," and then, lest Hodge should be put out of countenance, he added, "but he is a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed." He told Langton once of a young gentleman who, when last heard of, was "running about town shooting cats ; but," he murmured, in a kindly reverie, "Hodge shan't be shot ; no, no, Hodge shall not be shot !" Once, when Johnson was staying at a house in Wales, the gardener brought in a hare which had been caught in the potatoes. The order was given to take it to the cook. Johnson asked to have it placed in his arms. He took it to the window and let it go, shouting to increase its speed. When his host complained that he had perhaps spoilt the dinner, Johnson replied by insisting that the rights of hospitality included an animal which had thus placed itself under the protection of the master of the garden.

We must proceed, however, to a more serious event. The year 1781 brought with it a catastrophe which profoundly affected the brief remainder of Johnson's life. Mr. Thrale, whose health had been shaken by fits, died suddenly on the 4th of April. The ultimate consequence was Johnson's loss of the second home, in which he had so often found refuge from melancholy, alleviation of physical suffering, and pleasure in social converse. The change did not follow at once, but as the catastrophe of a little social drama, upon the rights and wrongs of which a good deal of controversy has been expended.

Johnson was deeply affected by the loss of a friend whose face, as he said, "had never been turned upon him through fifteen years but with respect and benignity." He wrote solemn and affecting letters to the widow, and busied himself strenuously in her service. Thrale had made him one of his executors, leaving him a small legacy; and Johnson took, it seems, a rather simple-minded pleasure in dealing with important commercial affairs, and signing cheques for large sums of money. The old man of letters, to whom three hundred a year had been superabundant wealth, was amused at finding himself in the position of a man of business, regulating what was then regarded as a princely fortune. The brewery was sold after a time, and Johnson bustled about with an ink-horn and pen in his button-hole. When asked what was the value of the property, he replied magniloquently, "We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice." The brewery was in fact sold to Barclay, Perkins, and Co. for the sum of 135,000*l.*, and some years afterwards it was the largest concern of the kind in the world.

The first effect of the change was probably rather to tighten than to relax the bond of union with the Thrale family. During the winter of 1781-2, Johnson's infirmities were growing upon him. In the beginning of 1782 he was suffering from an illness which excited serious apprehensions, and he went to Mrs. Thrale's, as the only house where he could use "all the freedom that sickness requires." She nursed him carefully, and expressed her feelings with characteristic vehemence in a curious journal which he had encouraged her to keep. It records her opinions about her affairs and her family, with a frankness remarkable even in writing intended for no eye but her own. "Here is Mr. Johnson very ill," she writes on the 1st of February. . . . "What shall we do for him? If I lose *him* I am more than undone—friend, father, guardian, confidant! God give me health and patience! What shall I do?" There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of these sentiments, though they seem to represent a mood of excitement. They show that for ten months after Thrale's death Mrs. Thrale was keenly sensitive to the value of Johnson's friendship.

A change, however, was approaching. Towards the end of 1780

Mrs. Thrale had made the acquaintance of an Italian musician named Piozzi, a man of amiable and honourable character, making an independent income by his profession, but to the eyes of most people rather inoffensive than specially attractive. The friendship between Mrs. Thrale and Piozzi rapidly became closer, and by the end of 1781 she was on very intimate terms with the gentleman whom she calls "my Piozzi." He had been making a professional trip to the Continent during part of the period since her husband's death, and upon his return in November Johnson congratulated her upon having two friends who loved her, in terms which suggest no existing feeling of jealousy. During 1782 the mutual affection of the lady and the musician became stronger, and in the autumn they had avowed it to each other, and were discussing the question of marriage.

No one who has had some experience of life will be inclined to condemn Mrs. Thrale for her passion. Rather the capacity for a passion not excited by an intrinsically unworthy object should increase our esteem for her. Her marriage with Thrale had been, as has been said, one of convenience; and, though she bore him many children and did her duty faithfully, she never loved him. Towards the end of his life he had made her jealous by very marked attentions to the pretty and sentimental Sophy Streatfield, which once caused a scene at his table; and during the last two years his mind had been weakened, and his conduct had caused her anxiety and discomfort. It is not surprising that she should welcome the warm and simple devotion of her new lover, though she was of a ripe age and the mother of grown-up daughters.

It is, however, equally plain that an alliance with a foreign fiddler was certain to shock British respectability. It is the old story of the quarrel between Philistia and Bohemia. Nor was respectability without much to say for itself. Piozzi was a Catholic as well as a foreigner; to marry him was in all probability to break with daughters just growing into womanhood, whom it was obviously her first duty to protect. The marriage, therefore, might be regarded as not merely a revolt against conventional morality, but as leading to a desertion of country, religion, and family. Her children, her husband's friends, and her whole circle were certain to look upon the match with feelings of the strongest disapproval, and she admitted to herself that the objections were founded upon something more weighty than a fear of the world's censure.

Johnson, in particular, among whose virtues one cannot reckon a superiority to British prejudice, would inevitably consider the marriage as simply degrading. Foreseeing this, and wishing to avoid the pain of rejecting advice which she felt unable to accept, she refrained from retaining her "friend, father, and guardian" in the position of "confidant." Her situation in the summer of 1782 was therefore exceedingly trying. She was unhappy at home. Her children, she



complains, did not love her; her servants "devoured" her; her friends censured her; and her expenses were excessive, whilst the loss of a lawsuit strained her resources. Johnson, sickly, suffering and descending into the gloom of approaching decay, was present like a charged thunder-cloud ready to burst at any moment, if she allowed him to approach the chief subject of her thoughts. Though not in love with Mrs. Thrale, he had a very intelligible feeling of jealousy towards any one who threatened to distract her allegiance. Under such circumstances we might expect the state of things which Miss Burney described long afterwards (though with some confusion of date). Mrs. Thrale, she says, was absent and agitated, restless in manner, and hurried in speech, forcing smiles, and averting her eyes from her friends: neglecting every one, including Johnson and excepting only Miss Burney herself, to whom the secret was confided, and the situation therefore explained. Gradually, according to Miss Burney, she became more petulant to Johnson than she was herself aware, gave palpable hints of being worried by his company, and finally excited his resentment and suspicion. In one or two utterances, though he doubtless felt the expedience of reserve, he intrusted his forebodings to Miss Burney, and declared that Streatham was lost to him for ever.

At last, in the end of August, the crisis came. Mrs. Thrale's lawsuit had gone against her. She thought it desirable to go abroad and save money. It had moreover been "long her dearest wish" to see Italy, with Piozzi for a guide. The one difficulty (as she says in her journal at the time), was that it seemed equally hard to part with Johnson or to take him with her till he had regained strength. At last, however, she took courage to confide to him her plans for travel. To her extreme annoyance he fully approved of them. He advised her to go; anticipated her return in two or three years; and told her daughter that he should not accompany them, even if invited. No behaviour, it may be admitted, could be more provoking than this unforeseen reasonableness. To nerve oneself to part with a friend, and to find the friend perfectly ready, and all your battery of argument thrown away, is most vexatious. The poor man should have begged her to stay with him, or to take him with her; he should have made the scene which she professed to dread, but which would have been the best proof of her power. The only conclusion which could really have satisfied her—though she, in all probability, did not know it—would have been an outburst which would have justified a rupture, and allowed her to protest against his tyranny as she now proceeded to protest against his complacency.

Johnson wished to go to Italy two years later; and his present willingness to be left was probably caused by a growing sense of the dangers which threatened their friendship. Mrs. Thrale's anger appears in her journal. He had never really loved her, she declares:

his affection for her had been interested, though even in her wrath she admits that he really loved her husband ; he cared less for her conversation, which she had fancied necessary to his existence, than for her "roast beef and plumb pudding," which he now devours too "dirtily for endurance." She was fully resolved to go, and yet she could not bear that her going should fail to torture the friend whom for eighteen years she had loved and cherished so kindly.

No one has a right at once to insist upon the compliance of his friends, and to insist that it should be a painful compliance. Still Mrs. Thrale's petulant outburst was natural enough. It requires notice because her subsequent account of the rupture has given rise to attacks on Johnson's character. Her "*Anecdotes*," written in 1785, show that her real affection for Johnson was still coloured by resentment for his conduct at this and a later period. They have an apologetic character which shows itself in a statement as to the origin of the quarrel, curiously different from the contemporary accounts in the diary. She says substantially, and the whole book is written so as to give probability to the assertion, that Johnson's bearishness and demands upon her indulgence had become intolerable, when he was no longer under restraint from her husband's presence. She therefore "took advantage" of her lost lawsuit and other troubles to leave London, and thus escape from his domestic tyranny. He no longer, as she adds, suffered from anything but "old age and general infirmity" (a tolerably wide exception), and did not require her nursing. She therefore withdrew from the yoke to which she had contentedly submitted during her husband's life, but which was intolerable when her "coadjutor was no more."

Johnson's society was, we may easily believe, very trying to a widow in such a position ; and it seems to be true that Thrale was better able than Mrs. Thrale to restrain his oddities, little as the lady shrunk at times from reasonable plain-speaking. But the later account involves something more than a bare suppression of the truth. The excuse about his health is, perhaps, the worst part of her case, because obviously insincere. Nobody could be more fully aware than Mrs. Thrale that Johnson's infirmities were rapidly gathering, and that another winter or two must in all probability be fatal to him. She knew, therefore, that he was never more in want of the care which, as she seems to imply, had saved him from the specific tendency to something like madness. She knew, in fact, that she was throwing him upon the care of his other friends, zealous and affectionate enough, it is true, but yet unable to supply him with the domestic comforts of Streatham. She clearly felt that this was a real injury, inevitable it might be under the circumstances, but certainly not to be extenuated by the paltry evasion as to his improved health. So far from Johnson's health being now established, she had not dared to speak until his temporary recovery from a dangerous illness, which

had provoked her at the time to the strongest expressions of anxious regret. She had (according to the diary) regarded a possible breaking of the yoke in the early part of 1782 as a terrible evil, which would "more than ruin her." Even when resolved to leave Streatham, her one great difficulty is the dread of parting with Johnson, and the pecuniary troubles are the solid and conclusive reason. In the latter account the money question is the mere pretext; the desire to leave Johnson the true motive; and the long-cherished desire to see Italy with Piozzi is judiciously dropped out of notice altogether.

The truth is plain enough. Mrs. Thrale was torn by conflicting feelings. She still loved Johnson, and yet dreaded his certain disapproval of her strongest wishes. She respected him, but was resolved not to follow his advice. She wished to treat him with kindness and to be repaid with gratitude, and yet his presence and his affection were full of intolerable inconveniences. When an old friendship becomes a burden, the smaller infirmities of manner and temper to which we once submitted willingly become intolerable. She had borne with Johnson's modes of eating and with his rough reproofs to herself and her friends during sixteen years of her married life; and for nearly a year of her widowhood she still clung to him as the wisest and kindest of monitors. His manners had undergone no spasmodic change. They became intolerable when, for other reasons, she resented his possible interference, and wanted a very different guardian and confidant; and, therefore, she wished to part, and yet wished the initiative should come from him.

The decision to leave Streatham was taken. Johnson parted with deep regret from the house; he read a chapter of the Testament in the library; he took leave of the church with a kiss; he composed a prayer commending the family to the protection of Heaven; and he did not forget to note in his journal the details of the last dinner of which he partook. This quaint observation may have been due to some valetudinary motive, or, more probably, to some odd freak of association. Once, when eating an omelette, he was deeply affected because it recalled his old friend Nugent. "Ah, my dear friend," he said "in an agony," "I shall never eat omelette with thee again!" And in the present case there is an obscure reference to some funeral connected in his mind with a meal. The unlucky entry has caused some ridicule, but need hardly convince us that his love of the family in which for so many years he had been an honoured and honour-giving inmate was, as Miss Seward amiably suggests, in great measure "kit hen-love."

No immediate rupture followed the abandonment of the Streatham establishment. Johnson spent some weeks at Brighton with Mrs. Thrale, during which a crisis was taking place, without his knowledge, in her relations to Piozzi. After vehement altercations with her daughters, whom she criticises with great bitterness for their



utter want of heart, she resolved to break with Piozzi for at least a time. Her plan was to go to Bath, and there to retrench her expenses, in the hopes of being able to recall her lover at some future period. Meanwhile he left her and returned to Italy. After another winter in London, during which Johnson was still a frequent inmate of her house, she went to Bath with her daughters in April, 1783. A melancholy period followed for both the friends. Mrs. Thrale lost a younger daughter, and Johnson had a paralytic stroke in June. Death was sending preliminary warnings. A correspondence was kept up, which implies that the old terms were not ostensibly broken. Mrs. Thrale speaks tartly more than once; and Johnson's letters go into medical details with his customary plainness of speech, and he occasionally indulges in laments over the supposed change in her feelings. The gloom is thickening, and the old playful gallantry has died out. The old man evidently felt himself deserted, and suffered from the breaking-up of the asylum he had loved so well. The final catastrophe came in 1784, less than six months before Johnson's death.

After much suffering in mind and body, Mrs. Thrale had at last induced her daughters to consent to her marriage with Piozzi. She sent for him at once, and they were married in June, 1784. A painful correspondence followed. Mrs. Thrale announced her marriage in a friendly letter to Johnson, excusing her previous silence on the ground that discussion could only have caused them pain. The revelation, though Johnson could not have been quite unprepared, produced one of his bursts of fury. "Madam, if I interpret your letter rightly," wrote the old man, "you are ignominiously married. If it is yet undone, let us once more talk together. If you have abandoned your children and your religion, God forgive your wickedness! If you have forfeited your fame and your country, may your folly do no more mischief! If the last act is yet to do, I, who have loved you, esteemed you, revered you, and served you—I, who long thought you the first of womankind—entreat that before your fate is irrevocable, I may once more see you! I was, I once was, madam, most truly yours, Sam. Johnson."

Mrs. Thrale replied with spirit and dignity to this cry of blind indignation, speaking of her husband with becoming pride, and resenting the unfortunate phrase about her loss of "fame." She ended by declining further intercourse till Johnson could change his opinion of Piozzi. Johnson admitted in his reply that he had no right to resent her conduct; expressed his gratitude for the kindness which had "soothed twenty years of a life radically wretched," and implored her ("superfluously," as she says) to induce Piozzi to settle in England. He then took leave of her with an expression of sad forebodings. Mrs. Thrale, now Mrs. Piozzi, says that she replied affectionately; but the letter is missing. The friendship was broken off, and during the brief remainder of Johnson's life, the Piozzis were absent from England.

Of her there is little more to be said. After passing some time in Italy, where she became a light of that wretched little Della Cruscan society of which some faint memory is preserved by Gifford's ridicule, now pretty nearly forgotten with its objects, she returned with her husband to England. Her anecdotes of Johnson, published soon after his death, had a success which, in spite of much ridicule, encouraged her to some further literary efforts of a sprightly but ephemeral kind. She lived happily with Piozzi, and never had cause to regret her marriage. She was reconciled to her daughters sufficiently to renew a friendly intercourse; but the elder ones set up a separate establishment. Piozzi died not long afterwards. She was still a vivacious old lady, who celebrated her 80th birthday by a ball, and is supposed at that ripe age to have made an offer of marriage to a young actor. She died in May, 1821, leaving all that she could dispose of to a nephew of Piozzi's, who had been naturalised in England.

Meanwhile Johnson was rapidly approaching the grave. His old inmates, Levett and Miss, Williams, had gone before him; Goldsmith and Garrick and Beauclerk had become memories of the past; and the gloom gathered thickly around him. The old man clung to life with pathetic earnestness. Though life had been often melancholy, he never affected to conceal the horror with which he regarded death. He frequently declared that death must be dreadful to every reasonable man. "Death, my dear, is very dreadful," he says simply in a letter to Lucy Porter in the last year of his life. Still later he shocked a pious friend by admitting that the fear oppressed him. Dr. Adams tried the ordinary consolation of the divine goodness, and went so far as to suggest that hell might not imply much positive suffering. Johnson's religious views were of a different colour. "I am afraid," he said, "I may be one of those who shall be damned." "What do you mean by damned?" asked Adams. Johnson replied passionately and loudly, "Sent to hell, sir, and punished everlastingly." Remonstrances only deepened his melancholy, and he silenced his friends by exclaiming in gloomy agitation, "I'll have no more on't!" Often in these last years he was heard muttering to himself the passionate complaint of Claudio, "Ah, but to die and go we know not whither!" At other times he was speaking of some lost friend, and saying, "Poor man—and then he died!" The peculiar horror of death, which seems to indicate a tinge of insanity, was combined with utter fearlessness of pain. He called to the surgeons to cut deeper when performing a painful operation, and shortly before his death inflicted such wounds upon himself in hopes of obtaining relief as, very erroneously, to suggest the idea of suicide. Whilst his strength remained, he endeavoured to disperse melancholy by some of the old methods. In the winter of 1783-4 he got together the few surviving members of the old Ivy Lane Club, which had flourished when he was composing the

*Dictionary*; but the old place of meeting had vanished, most of the original members were dead, and the gathering can have been but melancholy. He started another club at the Essex Head, whose members were to meet twice a week, with the modest fine of three-pence for non-attendance. It appears to have included a rather "strange mixture" of people, and thereby to have given some scandal to Sir John Hawkins and even to Reynolds. They thought that his craving for society, increased by his loss of Streatham, was leading him to undignified concessions.

Amongst the members of the club, however, were such men as Horsley and Windham. Windham seems to have attracted more personal regard than most politicians, by a generous warmth of enthusiasm not too common in the class. In politics he was an ardent disciple of Burke's, whom he afterwards followed in his separation from the new Whigs. But, though adhering to the principles which Johnson detested, he knew, like his preceptor, how to win Johnson's warmest regard. He was the most eminent of the younger generation who now looked up to Johnson as a venerable relic from the past. Another was young Burke, that very priggish and silly young man, as he seems to have been, whose loss, none the less, broke the tender heart of his father. Friendships, now more interesting, were those with two of the most distinguished authoresses of the day. One of them was Hannah More, who was about this time coming to the conclusion that the talents which had gained her distinction in the literary, and even in the dramatic world, should be consecrated to less secular employment. Her vivacity during the earlier years of their acquaintance exposed her to an occasional rebuff. "She does not gain upon me, sir; I think her empty-headed," was one of his remarks; and it was to her that he said, according to Mrs. Thrale, though Boswell reports a softened version of the remark, that she should "consider what her flattery was worth before she choked him with it." More frequently he seems to have repaid it in kind. "There was no name in poetry," he said, "which might not be glad to own her poem"—the *Bas Bleu*. Certainly Johnson did not stick at trifles in intercourse with his female friends. He was delighted, shortly before his death, to "gallant it about" with her at Oxford, and in serious moments showed a respectful regard for her merits. Hannah More, who thus sat at the feet of Johnson, encouraged the juvenile ambition of Macaulay, and did not die till the historian had grown into manhood and fame. The other friendship noticed was with Fanny Burney, who also lived to our own time. Johnson's affection for this daughter of his friend, seems to have been amongst the tenderest of his old age. When she was first introduced to him at the Thales's, she was overpowered, and indeed had her head a little turned by flattery of the most agreeable kind that an author can receive. The "great literary Leviathan" showed himself to have the recently pub-



lished *Evelina* at his fingers' ends. He quoted, and almost acted passages. "La! Polly!" he exclaimed in a pert feminine accent, "only think! Miss has danced with a lord!" How many modern readers can assign its place to that quotation, or answer the question which poor Boswell asked in despair and amidst general ridicule for his ignorance, "What is a Brangton?" There is something pleasant in the enthusiasm with which men like Johnson and Burke welcomed the literary achievements of the young lady, whose first novels seem to have made a sensation almost as lively as that produced by Miss Brontë, and far superior to anything that fell to the lot of Miss Austen. Johnson seems also to have regarded her with personal affection. He had a tender interview with her shortly before his death; he begged her with solemn energy to remember him in her prayers; he apologized pathetically for being unable to see her, as his weakness increased; and sent her tender messages from his deathbed.

As the end drew near Johnson accepted the inevitable like a man. After spending most of the latter months of 1784 in the country with the friends who, after the loss of the Thralls, could give him most domestic comfort, he came back to London to die. He made his will, and settled a few matters of business, and was pleased to be told that he would be buried in Westminster Abbey. He uttered a few words of solemn advice to those who came near him, and took affecting leave of his friends. Langton, so warmly loved, was in close attendance. Johnson said to him tenderly, *Te teneam moriens deficiente manu*. Windham broke from political occupations to sit by the dying man; once Langton found Burke sitting by his bedside with three or four friends. "I am afraid," said Burke, "that so many of us must be oppressive to you." "No, sir, it is not so," replied Johnson, "and I must be in a wretched state indeed when your company would not be a delight to me." "My dear sir," said Burke, with a breaking voice, "you have always been too good to me;" and parted from his old friend for the last time. Of Reynolds he begged three things: to forgive a debt of thirty pounds, to read the Bible, and never to paint on Sundays. A few flashes of the old humour broke through. He said of a man who sat up with him: "Sir, the fellow's an idiot; he's as awkward as a turnspit when first put into the wheel, and as sleepy as a dormouse." His last recorded words were to a young lady who had begged for his blessing: "God bless you, my dear." The same day, December 13th, 1784, he gradually sank, and died peacefully. He was laid in the Abbey by the side of Goldsmith, and the playful prediction has been amply fulfilled:—

Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis.

The names of many greater writers are inscribed upon the walls of Westminster Abbey; but scarcely any one lies there whose heart was

more acutely responsive during life to the deepest and tenderest of human emotions. In visiting that strange gathering of departed heroes and statesmen and philanthropists and poets, there are many whose words and deeds have a far greater influence upon our imaginations; but there are very few whom, when all has been said, we can love so heartily as Samuel Johnson.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### JOHNSON'S WRITINGS.

IT remains to speak of Johnson's position in literature. For reasons sufficiently obvious, few men whose lives have been devoted to letters for an equal period, have left behind them such scanty and inadequate remains. Johnson, as we have seen, worked only under the pressure of circumstances; a very small proportion of his latter life was devoted to literary employment. The working hours of his earlier years were spent for the most part in productions which can hardly be called literary. Seven years were devoted to the *Dictionary*, which, whatever its merits, could be a book only in the material sense of the word, and was of course destined to be soon superseded. Much of his hack-work has doubtless passed into oblivion, and though the ordinary relic-worship has gathered together fragments enough to fill twelve decent octavo volumes (to which may be added the two volumes of parliamentary reports), the part which can be called alive may be compressed into very moderate compass. Johnson may be considered as a poet, an essayist, a pamphleteer, a traveller, a critic, and a biographer. Among his poems, the two imitations of Juvenal, especially the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, and a minor fragment or two, probably deserve more respect than would be conceded to them by adherents of modern schools. His most ambitious work, *Irene*, can be read by men in whom a sense of duty has been abnormally developed. Among the two hundred and odd essays of the *Rambler*, there is a fair proportion which will deserve, but will hardly obtain, respectful attention. *Rasselas*, one of the philosophical tales popular in the last century, gives the essence of much of the *Rambler* in a different form, and to these may be added the essay upon Soame Jenyns, which deals with the same absorbing question of human happiness. The political pamphlets, and the *Journey to the Hebrides*, have a certain historical interest, but are otherwise readable only in particular passages. Much of his criticism is pretty nearly obsolete; but the child of his old age—the *Lives of the Poets*—a book in which criticism and biography are combined, is an admirable performance

in spite of serious defects. It is the work that best reflects his mind, and intelligent readers who have once made its acquaintance, will be apt to turn it into a familiar companion.

If it is easy to assign the causes which limited the quantity of Johnson's work, it is more curious to inquire what was the quality which once gained for it so much authority, and which now seems to have so far lost its savour. The peculiar style which is associated with Johnson's name must count for something in both processes. The mannerism is strongly marked, and of course offensive; for by "mannerism," as I understand the word, is meant the repetition of certain forms of language in obedience to blind habit and without reference to their propriety in the particular case. Johnson's sentences seem to be contorted, as his gigantic limbs used to twitch, by a kind of mechanical spasmodic action. The most obvious peculiarity is the tendency which he noticed himself, to "use too big words and too many of them." He had to explain to Miss Reynolds that the Shakespearian line,—

You must borrow me Garagantua's mouth,

had been applied to him because he used "big words, which require the mouth of a giant to pronounce them." It was not, however, the mere bigness of the words that distinguished his style, but a peculiar love of putting the abstract for the concrete, of using awkward inversions, and of balancing his sentences in a monotonous rhythm, which gives the appearance, as it sometimes corresponds to the reality, of elaborate logical discrimination. With all its faults the style has the merits of masculine directness. The inversions are not such as to complicate the construction. As Boswell remarks, he never uses a parenthesis; and his style, though ponderous and wearisome, is as transparent as the smarter snipsnap of Macaulay.

This singular mannerism appears in his earliest writings; it is most marked at the time of the *Rambler*; whilst in the *Lives of the Poets*, although I think that the trick of inversion has become commoner, the other peculiarities have been so far softened as (in my judgment, at least), to be inoffensive. It is perhaps needless to give examples of a tendency which marks almost every page of his writing. A passage or two from the *Rambler* may illustrate the quality of the style, and the oddity of the effect produced, when it is applied to topics of a trivial kind. The author of the *Rambler* is supposed to receive a remonstrance upon his excessive gravity from the lively Flirtilla, who wishes him to write in defence of masquerades. Conscious of his own incapacity, he applies to a man of "high reputation in gay life;" who, on the fifth perusal of Flirtilla's letter, breaks into a rapture, and declares that he is ready to devote himself to her service. Here is part of the apostrophe put into the mouth of this brilliant rake.



"Behold, Flirtilla, at thy feet a man grown gray in the study of those noble arts by which right and wrong may be confounded ; by which reason may be blinded, when we have a mind to escape from her inspection, and caprice and appetite instated in uncontrolled command and boundless dominion ! Such a casuist may surely engage with certainty of success in vindication of an entertainment which in an instant gives confidence to the timorous and kindles ardour in the cold, an entertainment where the vigilance of jealousy has so often been clouded, and the virgin is set free from the necessity of languishing in silence ; where all the outworks of chastity are at once demolished ; where the heart is laid open without a blush ; where bashfulness may survive virtue, and no wish is crushed under the frown of modesty."

Here is another passage, in which Johnson is speaking upon a topic more within his proper province ; and which contains sound sense under its weight of words. A man, he says, who reads a printed book, is often contented to be pleased without critical examination. "But," he adds, "if the same man be called to consider the merit of a production yet unpublished, he brings an imagination heated with objections to passages which he has never yet heard ; he invokes all the powers of criticism, and stores his memory with Taste and Grace, Purity and Delicacy, Manners and Unities, sounds which having been once uttered by those that understood them, have been since re-echoed without meaning, and kept up to the disturbance of the world by constant repercussion from one coxcomb to another. He considers himself as obliged to show by some proof of his abilities, that he is not consulted to no purpose, and therefore watches every opening for objection, and looks round for every opportunity to propose some specious alteration. Such opportunities a very small degree of sagacity will enable him to find, for in every work of imagination, the disposition of parts, the insertion of incidents, and use of decorations may be varied in a thousand ways with equal propriety ; and, as in things nearly equal that will always seem best to every man which he himself produces, the critic, whose business is only to propose without the care of execution, can never want the satisfaction of believing that he has suggested very important improvements, nor the power of enforcing his advice by arguments, which, as they appear convincing to himself, either his kindness or his vanity will press obstinately and importunately, without suspicion that he may possibly judge too hastily in favour of his own advice or inquiry whether the advantage of the new scheme be proportionate to the labour." We may still notice a "repercussion" of words from one coxcomb to another ; though somehow the words have been changed or translated.

Johnson's style is characteristic of the individual and of the epoch. The preceding generation had exhibited the final triumph of common sense over the pedantry of a decaying scholasticism. The movements represented by Locke's philosophy, by the rationalizing school in the

ology, and by the so-called classicism of Pope and his followers, are different phases of the same impulse. The quality valued above all others in philosophy, literature, and art was clear, bright, common sense. To expel the mystery which had served as a cloak for charlatans was the great aim of the time, and the method was to appeal from the professors of exploded technicalities to the judgment of cultivated men of the world. Berkeley places his Utopia in happy climes,—

Where nature guides, and virtue rules,  
Where men shall not impose for truth and sense  
The pedantry of courts and schools.

Simplicity, clearness, directness are, therefore, the great virtues of thought and style. Berkeley, Addison, Pope, and Swift are the great models of such excellence in various departments of literature.

In the succeeding generation we become aware of a certain leaven of dissatisfaction with the æsthetic and intellectual code thus inherited. The supremacy of common sense, the superlative importance of clearness, is still fully acknowledged, but there is a growing undertone of dissent in form and substance. Attempts are made to restore philosophical conceptions assailed by Locke and his followers; the rationalism of the deistic or semi-deistic writers is declared to be superficial; their optimistic theories disregard the dark side of nature, and provide no sufficient utterance for the sadness caused by the contemplation of human suffering; and the polished monotony of Pope's verses begins to pall upon those who shall tread in his steps. Some daring sceptics are even inquiring whether he is a poet at all. And simultaneously, though Addison is still a kind of sacred model, the best prose writers are beginning to aim at a more complex structure of sentence, fitted for the expression of a wider range of thought and emotion.

Johnson, though no conscious revolutionist, shares this growing discontent. The *Spectator* is written in the language of the drawing-room and the coffee-house. Nothing is ever said which might not pass in conversation between a couple of "wits," with, at most, some graceful indulgence in passing moods of solemn or tender sentiment. Johnson, though devoted to society in his own way, was anything but a producer of small talk. Society meant to him an escape from the gloom which beset him whenever he was abandoned to his thoughts. Neither his education nor the manners acquired in Grub Street had qualified him to be an observer of those lighter foibles which were touched by Addison with so dexterous a hand. When he ventures upon such topics he flounders dreadfully, and rather reminds us of an artist who should attempt to paint miniatures with a mop. No man, indeed, took more of interest in what is called the science of human nature; and, when roused by the stimulus of argument, he could talk, as has been shown, with almost unrivalled vigour and

point. But his favourite topics are the deeper springs of character, rather than superficial peculiarities ; and his vigorous sayings are concentrated essence of strong sense and deep feeling, not dainty epigrams or graceful embodiments of delicate observation. Johnson was not, like some contemporary antiquarians, a systematic student of the English literature of the preceding centuries, but he had a strong affection for some of its chief masterpieces. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* was, he declared, the only book which ever got him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished. Sir Thomas Browne was another congenial writer, who is supposed to have had some influence upon his style. He never seems to have directly imitated any one, though some nonsense has been talked about his "forming a style ;" but it is probable that he felt a closer affinity to those old scholars, with their elaborate and ornate language and their deep and solemn tone of sentiment, than to the brilliant but comparatively superficial writers of Queen Anne's time. He was, one may say, a scholar of the old type, forced by circumstances upon the world, but always retaining a sympathy for the scholar's life and temper. Accordingly, his style acquired something of the old elaboration, though the attempt to conform to the canons of a later age renders the structure disagreeably monotonous. His tendency to pomposity is not redeemed by the *naïveté* and spontaneity of his masters.

The inferiority of Johnson's written to his spoken utterances is indicative of his divided life. There are moments at which his writing takes the terse, vigorous tone of his talk. In his letters, such as those to Chesterfield and Macpherson, and in occasional passages of his pamphlets, we see that he could be pithy enough when he chose to descend from his Latinized abstractions to good concrete English ; but that is only when he becomes excited. His face when in repose, we are told, appeared to be almost imbecile ; he was constantly sunk in reveries, from which he was only roused by a challenge to conversation. In his writings, for the most part, we seem to be listening to the reverie rather than the talk ; we are overhearing a soliloquy in his study, not a vigorous discussion over the twentieth cup of tea ; he is not fairly put upon his mettle, and is content to expound without enforcing. We seem to see a man, heavy-eyed, ponderous in his gestures, like some huge mechanism which grinds out a ponderous tissue of verbiage as heavy as it is certainly solid.

The substance corresponds to the style. Johnson has something in common with the fashionable pessimism of modern times. No sentimentalist of to-day could be more convinced that life is in the main miserable. It was his favourite theory, according to Mrs. Thrale, that all human action was prompted by the "vacuity of life." Men act solely in the hope of escaping from themselves. Evil, as a follower of Schopenhauer would assert, is the positive, and good merely the negative of evil. All desire is at bottom an attempt to escape



from pain. The doctrine neither resulted from, nor generated, a philosophical theory in Johnson's case, and was in the main a generalization of his own experience. Not the less, the aim of most of his writing is to express this sentiment in one form or other. He differs, indeed, from most modern sentimentalists, in having the most hearty contempt for useless whining. If he dwells upon human misery, it is because he feels that it is as futile to join with the optimist in ignoring, as with the pessimist in howling over the evil. We are in a sad world, full of pain, but we have to make the best of it. Stubborn patience and hard work are the sole remedies, or rather the sole means of temporary escape. Much of the *Rambler* is occupied with variations upon this theme, and expresses the kind of dogged resolution with which he would have us plod through this weary world. Take for example this passage :—"The controversy about the reality of external evils is now at an end. That life has many miseries, and that those miseries are sometimes at least equal to all the powers of fortitude, is now universally confessed ; and, therefore, it is useful to consider not only how we may escape them, but by what means those which either the accidents of affairs or the infirmities of nature must bring upon us may be mitigated and lightened, and how we may make those hours less wretched which the condition of our present existence will not allow to be very happy.

"The cure for the greatest part of human miseries is not radical, but palliative. Infelicity is involved in corporeal nature, and interwoven with our being ; all attempts, therefore, to decline it wholly are useless and vain ; the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side, the choice is only between those which are more or less sharp, or tinged with poison of greater or less malignity ; and the strongest armour which reason can supply will only blunt their points, but cannot repel them.

"The great remedy which Heaven has put in our hands is patience, by which, though we cannot lessen the torments of the body, we can in a great measure preserve the peace of the mind, and shall suffer only the natural and genuine force of an evil, without heightening its acrimony or prolonging its effects."

It is hardly desirable for a moralist to aim at originality in his precepts. We must be content if he enforces old truths in such a manner as to convince us of the depth and sincerity of his feeling. Johnson, it must be confessed, rather abuses the moralist's privilege of being commonplace. He descants not unfrequently upon propositions so trite that even the most earnest enforcement can give them little interest. With all drawbacks, however, the moralizing is the best part of the *Rambler*. Many of the papers follow the precedent set by Addison in the *Spectator*, but without Addison's felicity. Like Addison, he indulges in allegory, which, in his hands, becomes unen-

durably frigid and clumsy ; he tries light social satire, and is fain to confess that we can spy a beard under the muffler of his feminine characters ; he treats us to criticism which, like Addison's, goes upon exploded principles, but, unlike Addison's, is apt to be almost wilfully outrageous. His odd remarks upon Milton's versification are the worst example of this weakness. The result is what one might expect from the attempt of a writer without an ear to sit in judgment upon the greatest master of harmony in the language.

These defects have consigned the *Rambler* to the dustiest shelves of libraries, and account for the wonder expressed by such a critic as M. Taine at the English love of Johnson. Certainly if that love were nourished, as he seems to fancy, by assiduous study of the *Rambler*, it would be a curious phenomenon. And yet with all its faults, the reader who can plod through its pages will at least feel respect for the author. It is not unworthy of the man whose great lesson is "clear your mind of cant ;"\* who felt most deeply the misery of the world, but from the bottom of his heart despised querulous and sentimental complaints on one side, and optimist glasses upon the other. To him, as to some others of his temperament, the affectation of looking at the bright side of things seems to have presented itself as the bitterest of mockeries ; and nothing would tempt him to let fine words pass themselves off for genuine sense. Here are some remarks upon the vanity in which some authors seek for consolation, which may illustrate this love of realities and conclude our quotations from the *Rambler*.

"By such acts of voluntary delusion does every man endeavour to conceal his own unimportance from himself. It is long before we are convinced of the small proportion which every individual bears to the collective body of mankind ; or learn how few can be interested in the future of any single man ; how little vacancy is left in the world for any new object of attention ; to how small extent the brightest blaze of merit can be spread amidst the mists of business and of folly ; and how soon it is clouded by the intervention of other novelties. Not only the writer of books, but the commander of armies, and the deliverer of nations, will easily outlive all noisy and popular reputation ; he may be celebrated for a time by the public voice, but his actions and his name will soon be considered as remote and unaffecting, and be rarely mentioned but by those whose alliance gives them some vanity to gratify by frequent commemoration. It seems not to be sufficiently considered how little renown can be ad-

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\* Of this well-known sentiment it may be said, as of some other familiar quotations, that its direct meaning has been slightly modified in use. The emphasis is changed. Johnson's words were "Clear your *mind* of cant. You may talk as other people do ; you may say to a man, Sir, I am your humble servant ; you are *not* his most humble servant. . . . You may *talk* in this manner ; it is a mode of talking in society ; but don't *think* foolishly."

mitted in the world. Mankind are kept perpetually busy by their fears or desires, and have not more leisure from their own affairs than to acquaint themselves with the accidents of the current day. Engaged in contriving some refuge from calamity, or in shortening their way to some new possession, they seldom suffer their thoughts to wander to the past or future; none but a few solitary students have leisure to inquire into the claims of ancient heroes or sages; and names which hoped to range over kingdoms and continents shrink at last into cloisters and colleges. Nor is it certain that even of these dark and narrow habitations, these last retreats of fame, the possession will be long kept. Of men devoted to literature very few extend their views beyond some particular science, and the greater part seldom inquire, even in their own profession, for any authors but those whom the present mode of study happens to force upon their notice; they desire not to fill their minds with unfashionable knowledge, but contentedly resign to oblivion those books which they now find censured or neglected."

The most remarkable of Johnson's utterances upon his favourite topic of the Vanity of Human Wishes is the story of *Rasselas*. The plan of the book is simple, and recalls certain parts of Voltaire's simultaneous but incomparably more brilliant attack upon Optimism in *Candide*. There is supposed to be a happy valley in Abyssinia where the royal princes are confined in total seclusion, but with ample supplies for every conceivable want. Rasselas, who has been thus educated, becomes curious as to the outside world, and at last makes his escape with his sister, her attendant, and the ancient sage and poet, Imlac. Under Imlac's guidance they survey life and manners in various stations; they make the acquaintance of philosophers, statesmen, men of the world, and recluses; they discuss the results of their experience pretty much in the style of the *Rambler*; they agree to pronounce the sentence "Vanity of Vanities!" and finally, in a "conclusion, where nothing is concluded," they resolve to return to the happy valley. The book is little more than a set of essays upon life, with just story enough to hold it together. It is wanting in those brilliant flashes of epigram, which illustrate Voltaire's pages so as to blind some readers to its real force of sentiment, and yet it leaves a peculiar and powerful impression upon the reader.

The general tone may be collected from a few passages. Here is a fragment, the conclusion of which is perhaps the most familiar of quotations from Johnson's writings. Imlac in narrating his life describes his attempts to become a poet.

"The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall



the original to every mind ; and must neglect the minute discriminations which one may have remarked, and another have neglected for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness."

" But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet ; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition ; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and know the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions, and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondency of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country ; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state ; he must disregard present laws and opinions ; and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same ; he must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name ; contemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place.

" His labours are not yet at an end ; he must know many languages and many sciences ; and that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must by incessant practice familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony."

Imlac now felt the enthusiastic fit, and was proceeding to aggrandize his profession, when the prince cried out, " Enough, thou hast convinced me that no human being can ever be a poet."

Indeed, Johnson's conception of poetry is not the one which is now fashionable, and which would rather seem to imply that philosophical power and moral sensibility are so far disqualifications to the true poet.

Here, again, is a view of the superfine system of moral philosophy. A meeting of learned men is discussing the ever-recurring problem of happiness, and one of them speaks as follows :—

" The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed ; which is not written on it by precept, but engraven by destiny, not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity. He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire ; he will receive and reject with equability of temper, and act or suffer as the reason of things shall alternately prescribe. Other men may amuse themselves with subtle definitions or intricate ratiocinations. Let him learn to be wise by easier means : let him observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove ; let him consider the life of

the animals whose motions are regulated by instinct ; they obey their guide and are happy.

“ Let us, therefore, at length cease to dispute, and learn to live ; throw away the incumbrance of precepts, which they who utter them with so much pride and pomp do not understand, and carry with us this simple and intelligible maxim, that deviation from nature is deviation from happiness.”

The prince modestly inquires what is the precise meaning of the advice just given.

“ When I find young men so humble and so docile,” said the philosopher, “ I can deny them no information which my studies have enabled me to afford. To live according to nature is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects, to concur with the great unchangeable scheme of universal felicity ; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things.

“ The prince soon found that this was one of the sages, whom he should understand less as he heard him longer.”

Here, finally, is a characteristic reflection upon the right mode of meeting sorrow.

“ The state of a mind oppressed with a sudden calamity,” said Imlac, “ is like that of the fabulous inhabitants of the new created earth, who, when the first night came upon them, supposed that day would never return. When the clouds of sorrow gather over us, we see nothing beyond them, nor can imagine how they will be dispelled ; yet a new day succeeded to the night, and sorrow is never long without a dawn of ease. But they who restrain themselves from receiving comfort, do as the savages would have done, had they put out their eyes when it was dark. Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux ; something is hourly lost, and something acquired. To lose much at once is inconvenient to either, but while the vital powers remain uninjured, nature will find the means of reparation.

“ Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye, and while we glide along the stream of time, whatever we leave behind us is always lessening, and that which we approach increasing in magnitude. Do not suffer life to stagnate ; it will grow muddy for want of motion ; commit yourself again to the current of the world ; Pekuah will vanish by degrees ; you will meet in your way some other favourite, or learn to diffuse yourself in general conversation.”

In one respect *Rasselas* is curiously contrasted with *Candide*. Voltaire's story is aimed at the doctrine of theological optimism, and, whether that doctrine be well or ill understood, has therefore an openly sceptical tendency. Johnson, to whom nothing could be more abhorrent than an alliance with any assailant of orthodoxy, draws no inference from his pessimism. He is content to state the fact of human misery without perplexing himself with the resulting problem

as to the final cause of human existence. If the question had been explicitly brought before him, he would, doubtless, have replied that the mystery was insoluble. To answer either in the sceptical or the optimistic sense was equally presumptuous. Johnson's religious beliefs in fact were not such as to suggest that kind of comfort which is to be obtained by explaining away the existence of evil. If he, too, would have said that in some sense all must be for the best in a world ruled by a perfect Creator, the sense must be one which would allow of the eternal misery of indefinite multitudes of his creatures.

But, in truth, it was characteristic of Johnson to turn away his mind from such topics. He was interested in ethical speculations, but on the practical side, in the application to life, not in the philosophy on which it might be grounded. In that direction he could see nothing but a "milking of the bull"—a fruitless or rather a pernicious waste of intellect. An intense conviction of the supreme importance of a moral guidance in this difficult world, made him abhor any rash inquiries by which the basis of existing authority might be endangered.

This sentiment is involved in many of those prejudices which I have been so much, and in some sense justifiably, ridiculed. Man has been wretched and foolish since the race began, and will be till it ends; one chorus of lamentation has ever been rising, in countless dialects but with a single meaning; the plausible schemes of philosophers give no solution to the everlasting riddle; the nostrums of politicians touch only the surface of the deeply-rooted evil; it is folly to be querulous, and as silly to fancy that men are growing worse, as that they are much better than they used to be. The evils under which we suffer are not skin-deep, to be eradicated by changing the old physicians for new quacks. What is to be done under such conditions, but to hold fast as vigorously as we can to the rules of life and faith which have served our ancestors, and which, whatever their justifications, are at least the only consolation, because they supply the only guidance through this labyrinth of troubles? Macaulay has ridiculed Johnson for what he takes to be the ludicrous inconsistency of his intense political prejudice, combined with his assertion of the indifference of all forms of government. "If," says Macaulay, "the difference between two forms of government be not worth half a guinea, it is not easy to see how Whiggism can be viler than Toryism, or the Crown can have too little power." The answer is surely obvious. Whiggism is vile, according to the doctor's phrase, because Whiggism is a "negation of all principle;" it is in his view, not so much the preference of one form to another, as an attack upon the vital condition of all government. He called Burke a "bottomless Whig" in this sense, implying that Whiggism meant anarchy; and in the next generation a good many people were led, rightly or wrongly, to agree with him by the experience of the French revolution.

This dogged conservatism has both its value and its grotesque



side. When Johnson came to write political pamphlets in his later years, and to deal with subjects little familiar to his mind, the results were grotesque enough. Loving authority, and holding one authority to be as good as another, he defended with uncompromising zeal the most preposterous and tyrannical measures. The pamphlets against the Wilkite agitators and the American rebels are little more than a huge "rhinoceros" snort of contempt against all who are fools enough or wicked enough to promote war and disturbance in order to change one form of authority for another. Here is a characteristic passage, giving his view of the value of such demonstrators :—

"The progress of a petition is well known. An ejected placeman goes down to his county or his borough, tells his friends of his inability to serve them and his constituents, of the corruption of the government. His friends readily understand that he who can get nothing will have nothing to give. They agree to proclaim a meeting. Meat and drink are plentifully provided, a crowd is easily brought together, and those who think that they know the reason of the meeting undertake to tell those who know it not. Ale and clamour unite their powers; the crowd, condensed and heated, begins to ferment with the leaven of sedition. All see a thousand evils, though they cannot show them, and grow impatient for a remedy, though they know not what.

"A speech is then made by the Cicero of the day; he says much and suppresses more, and credit is equally given to what he tells and what he conceals. The petition is heard and universally approved. Those who are sober enough to write add their names, and the rest would sign it if they could.

"Every man goes home and tells his neighbour of the glories of the day: how he was consulted, and what he advised; how he was invited into the great room, where his lordship called him by his name; how he was caressed by Sir Francis, Sir Joseph, and Sir George; how he ate turtle and venison, and drank unanimity to the three brothers.

"The poor loiterer, whose shop had confined him or whose wife had locked him up, hears the tale of luxury with envy, and at last inquires what was their petition. Of the petition nothing is remembered by the narrator, but that it spoke much of fears and apprehensions and something very alarming, but that he is sure it is against the government.

"The other is convinced that it must be right, and wishes he had been there, for he loves wine and venison, and resolves as long as he lives to be against the government.

"The petition is then handed from town to town, and from house to house; and wherever it comes the inhabitants flock together that they may see that which must be sent to the king. Names are easily collected. One man signs because he hates the papists; another because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes; one because it will vex the parson; another because he owes his landlord nothing; one because he is rich; another because he is poor; one to show that he is not afraid; and another to show that he can write."

The only writing in which we see a distinct reflection of Johnson's talk is the *Lives of the Poets*. The excellence of that book is of the same kind as the excellence of his conversation. Johnson wrote it under pressure, and it has suffered from his characteristic indolence. Modern authors would fill as many pages as Johnson has filled lines, with the biographies of some of his heroes. By industriously sweeping together all the rubbish which is in any way connected with the great man, by elaborately discussing the possible significance of in-

infinitesimal bits of evidence, and by disquisition upon general principles or the whole mass of contemporary literature, it is easy to swell volumes to any desired extent. The result is sometimes highly interesting and valuable, as it is sometimes a new contribution to the dust-heaps; but in any case the design is something quite different from Johnson's. He has left much to be supplied and corrected by later scholars. His aim is simply to give a vigorous summary of the main facts of his heroes' lives, a pithy analysis of their character, and a short criticism of their productions. The strong sense which is everywhere displayed, the massive style, which is yet easier and less cumbersome than in his earlier work, and the uprightness and independence of the judgments, make the book agreeable even where we are most inclined to dissent from its conclusions.

The criticism is that of a school which has died out under the great revolution of modern taste. The booksellers decided that English poetry began for their purposes with Cowley, and Johnson has, therefore, nothing to say about some of the greatest names in our literature. The loss is little to be regretted, since the biographical part of earlier memoirs must have been scanty, and the criticism inappreciative. Johnson, it may be said, like most of his contemporaries, considered poetry almost exclusively from the didactic and logical point of view. He always inquires what is the moral of a work of art. If he does not precisely ask "what it proves," he pays excessive attention to the logical solidity and coherence of its sentiments. He condemns not only insincerity and affectation of feeling, but all such poetic imagery as does not correspond to the actual prosaic belief of the writer. For the purely musical effects of poetry he has little or no feeling, and allows little deviation from the alternate long and short syllables neatly bound in Pope's couplets.

To many readers this would imply that Johnson omits precisely the poetic element in poetry. I must be here content to say that in my opinion it implies rather a limitation than a fundamental error. Johnson errs in supposing that his logical tests are at all adequate; but it is, I think, a still greater error to assume that poetry has no connexion, because it has not this kind of connexion, with philosophy. His criticism has always a meaning, and in the case of works belonging to his own school a very sound meaning. When he is speaking of other poetry, we can only reply that his remarks may be true, but that they are not to the purpose.

The remarks on the poetry of Dryden, Addison and Pope are generally excellent, and always give the genuine expression of an independent judgment. Whoever thinks for himself, and says plainly what he thinks, has some merit as a critic. This, it is true, is about all that can be said for such criticism as that on *Lycidas*, which is a delicious example of the wrong way of applying strong sense to inappropriate topics. Nothing can be truer in a sense, and nothing less relevant.

"In this poem," he says, "there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are easily exhausted, and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. When Cowley tells of Hervey that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines?—

We drove afield, and both together heard  
What time the gray fly winds her sultry horn,  
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove afield and had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought, because it cannot be known when it is found.

"Among the flocks and copses and flowers appear the heathen deities: Jove and Phæbus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge or less exercise invention than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; how one god asks another god what has become of Lycidas, and neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour."

This is of course utterly outrageous, and yet much of it is undeniably true. To explain why, in spite of truth, *Lycidas* is a wonderful poem, would be to go pretty deeply into the theory of poetic expression. Most critics prefer simply to shriek, being at any rate safe from the errors of independent judgment.

The general effect of the book, however, is not to be inferred from this or some other passages of antiquated and eccentric criticism. It is the shrewd sense everywhere cropping up which is really delightful. The keen remarks upon life and character, though, perhaps, rather too severe in tone, are worthy of a vigorous mind, stored with much experience of many classes, and braced by constant exercise in the conversational arena. Passages everywhere abound which, though a little more formal in expression, have the forcible touch of his best conversational sallies. Some of the prejudices, which are expressed more pithily in *Boswell*, are defended by a reasoned exposition in the *Lives*. Sentence is passed with the true judicial air; and if he does not convince us of his complete impartiality, he at least bases his decisions upon solid and worthy grounds. It would be too much, for example, to expect that Johnson should sympathize with the grand republicanism of Milton, or pardon a man who defended the execution of the blessed Martyr. He failed, therefore, to satisfy the ardent



admirers of the great poet. Yet his judgment is not harsh or ungenerous, but, at worst, the judgment of a man striving to be just, in spite of some inevitable want of sympathy.

The quality of Johnson's incidental remarks may be inferred from one or two brief extracts. Here is an observation which Johnson must have had many chances of verifying. Speaking of Dryden's money difficulties, he says, "It is well known that he seldom lives frugally who lives by chance. Hope is always liberal, and they that trust her promises, make little scruple of revelling to-day on the profits of the morrow."

Here is another shrewd comment upon the compliments paid to Halifax, of whom Pope says in the character of Bufo,—

Fed with soft dedications all day long,  
Horace and he went hand and hand in song.

"To charge all unmerited praise with the guilt of flattery, or to suppose that the encomiast always knows and feels the falsehoods of his assertions, is surely to discover great ignorance of human nature and of human life. In determinations depending not on rules, but on reference and comparison, judgment is always in some degree subject to affection. Very near to admiration is the wish to admire.

"Every man willingly gives value to the praise which he receives, and considers the sentence passed in his favour as the sentence of discernment. We admire in a friend that understanding that selected us for confidence; we admire more in a patron that bounty which, instead of scattering bounty indiscriminately, directed it to us; and if the patron be an author, those performances which gratitude forbids us to blame, affection will easily dispose us to exalt.

"To these prejudices, hardly culpable, interest adds a power operating, though not always, because not willingly, perceived. The modesty of praise gradually wears away; and, perhaps, the pride of patronage may be in time so increased that modest praise will no longer please.

"Many a blandishment was practised upon Halifax, which he would never have known had he no other attractions than those of his poetry, of which a short time has withered the beauties. It would now be esteemed no honour by a contributor to the monthly bundles of verses, to be told that, in strains either familiar or solemn, he sings like Halifax."

I will venture to make a longer quotation from the life of Pope, which gives, I think, a good impression of his manner:—

"Of his social qualities, if an estimate be made from his letters, an opinion too favourable cannot easily be formed; they exhibit a perpetual and unclouded effulgence of general benevolence and particular fondness. There is nothing but liberality, gratitude, constancy, and tenderness. It has been so long said as to be commonly believed, that the true characters of men may be found in their letters, and that he who writes to his friend lays his heart open before him.

"But the truth is, that such were the simple friendships of the Golden Age, and are now the friendships only of children. Very few can boast of hearts which they dare lay open to themselves, and of which, by whatever accident exposed, they do not shun a distinct and continued view; and certainly what we hide from ourselves, we do not show to our friends. There is, indeed, no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse.

"In the eagerness of conversation, the first emotions of the mind often burst out before they are considered. In the tumult of business, interest and passion have their genuine effect; but a friendly letter is a calm and deliberate performance in

the cool of leisure, in the stillness of solitude, and surely no man sits down by design to depreciate his own character.

"Friendship has no tendency to secure veracity; for by whom can a man so much wish to be thought better than he is—as by him whose kindness he desires to gain or keep? Even in writing to the world there is less constraint; the author is not confronted with his reader, and takes his chance of approbation among the different dispositions of mankind; but a letter is addressed to a single mind, of which the prejudices and partialities are known, and must therefore please, if not by favouring them, by forbearing to oppose them. To charge those favourable representations which men give of their own minds, with the guilt of hypocritical falsehood, would show more severity than knowledge. The writer commonly believes himself. Almost every man's thoughts while they are general are right, and most hearts are pure while temptation is away. It is easy to awaken generous sentiments in privacy; to despise death when there is no danger; to glow with benevolence when there is nothing to be given. While such ideas are formed they are felt, and self-love does not suspect the gleam of virtue to be the meteor of fancy.

"If the letters of Pope are considered merely as compositions, they seem to be premeditated and artificial. It is one thing to write, because there is something which the mind wishes to discharge; and another to solicit the imagination, because ceremony or vanity requires something to be written. Pope confesses his early letters to have been vitiated with *affectation and ambition*. To know whether he disentangles himself from these perverters of epistolary integrity, his book and his life must be set in comparison. One of his favourite topics is contempt of his own poetry. For this, if he had been real, he would deserve no commendation; and in this he was certainly not sincere, for his high value of himself was sufficiently observed; and of what could he be proud but of his poetry? He writes, he says, when 'he has just nothing else to do,' yet Swift complains that he was never at leisure for conversation, because he 'had always some poetical scheme in his head.' It was punctually required that his writing-box should be set upon his bed before he rose; and Lord Oxford's domestic related that, in the dreadful winter of '40, she was called from her bed by him four times in one night, to supply him with paper lest he should lose a thought.

"He pretends insensibility to censure and criticism, though it was observed by all who knew him that every pamphlet disturbed his quiet, and that his extreme irritability laid him open to perpetual vexation; but he wished to despise his critics, and therefore hoped he did despise them. As he happened to live in two reigns when the court paid little attention to poetry, he nursed in his mind a foolish disesteem of kings, and proclaims that 'he never sees courts.' Yet a little regard shown him by the Prince of Wales melted his obduracy; and he had not much to say when he was asked by his Royal Highness, 'How he could love a prince while he disliked kings.'"

Johnson's best poetry is the versified expression of the tone of sentiment with which we are already familiar. The *Vanity of Human Wishes* is, perhaps, the finest poem written since Pope's time and in Pope's manner, with the exception of Goldsmith's still finer performances. Johnson, it need hardly be said, has not Goldsmith's exquisite fineness of touch and delicacy of sentiment. He is often ponderous and verbose, and one feels that the mode of expression is not that which is most congenial; and yet the vigour of thought makes itself felt through rather clumsy modes of utterance. Here is one of the best passages, in which he illustrates the vanity of military glory:—

On what foundation stands the warrior's pride,  
How just his hopes let Swedish Charles decide;  
A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,  
No dangers fright him and no labours tire;  
O'er love, o'er fear, extends his wide domain,  
Unconquer'd lord of pleasure and of pain;

No joys to him pacific sceptres yield,  
 War sounds the trump, he rushes to the field ;  
 Behold surrounding kings their powers combine,  
 And one capitulate, and one resign :  
 Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in vain.  
 "Think nothing gain'd," he cries, "till nought remain ;  
 On Moscow's walls till Gothic standards fly,  
 And all be mine beneath the polar sky."  
 The march begins in military state,  
 And nations on his eye suspended wait ;  
 Stern Famine guards the solitary coast,  
 And Winter barricades the realms of Frost.  
 He comes, nor want nor cold his course delay—  
 Hide, blushing glory, hide Pultowa's day!  
 The vanquish'd hero leaves his broken bands,  
 And shows his miseries in distant lands ;  
 Condemn'd a needy suppliant to wait,  
 While ladies interpose and slaves debate,—  
 But did not Chance at length her error mend ?  
 Did no subverted empire mark his end ?  
 Did rival monarchs give the fatal wound ?  
 Or hostile millions press him to the ground ?  
 His fall was destined to a barren strand,  
 A petty fortress and a dubious hand ;  
 He left the name at which the world grew pale,  
 To point a moral and adorn a tale.

The concluding passage may also fitly conclude this survey of Johnson's writings. The sentiment is less gloomy than is usual, but it gives the answer which he would have given in his calmer moods to the perplexed riddle of life ; and, in some form or other, it is, perhaps, the best or the only answer that can be given :—

Where, then, shall Hope and Fear their objects find ?  
 Must dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind ?  
 Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
 Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate ?  
 Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise ?  
 No cries invoke the mercies of the skies ?  
 Inquirer, cease ; petitions yet remain  
 Which Heaven may hear, nor deem religion vain ;  
 Still raise for good the supplicating voice,  
 But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice  
 Safe in His power whose eyes discern afar  
 The secret ambush of a specious prayer.  
 Implore His aid, in His decisions rest,  
 Secure whate'er He gives—He gives the best.  
 Yet when the scene of sacred presence fires,  
 And strong devotion to the skies aspires,  
 Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,  
 Obedient passions and a will resign'd ;  
 For Love, which scarce collective men can fill ;  
 For Patience, sovereign o'er transmuted ill ;  
 For Faith, that panting for a happier seat,  
 Counts Death kind nature's signal of retreat.  
 These goods for man the laws of Heaven ordain,  
 These goods He grants who grants the power to gain,  
 With these Celestial Wisdom calms the mind,  
 And makes the happiness she does not find.



# GOLDSMITH.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK.



# GOLDSMITH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

"INNOCENTLY to amuse the imagination in this dream of life is wisdom." So wrote Oliver Goldsmith; and surely among those who have earned the world's gratitude by this ministration he must be accorded a conspicuous place. If, in these delightful writings of his, he mostly avoids the darker problems of existence—if the mystery of the tragic and apparently unmerited and unrequited suffering in the world is rarely touched upon—we can pardon the omission for the sake of the gentle optimism that would rather look on the kindly side of life. "You come hot and tired from the day's battle, and this sweet minstrel sings to you," says Mr. Thackeray. "Who could harm the kind vagrant harper? Whom did he ever hurt? He carries no weapon save the harp on which he plays to you; and with which he delights great and humble, young and old, the captains in the tents, or the soldiers round the fire, or the women and children in the villages, at whose porches he stops and sings his simple songs of love and beauty." And it is to be suspected—it is to be hoped, at least—that the cheerfulness which shines like sunlight through Goldsmith's writings, did not altogether desert himself even in the most trying hours of his wayward and troubled career. He had, with all his sensitiveness, a fine happy-go-lucky disposition; was ready for a frolic when he had a guinea, and, when he had none, could turn a sentence on the humorous side of starvation; and certainly never attributed to the injustice or neglect of society misfortunes the origin of which lay nearer home.

Of course, a very dark picture might be drawn of Goldsmith's life; and the sufferings that he undoubtedly endured have been made a whip with which to lash the ingratitude of a world not too quick to recognize the claims of genius. He has been put before us, without any brighter lights to the picture, as the most unfortunate of poor devils; the heart-broken usher; the hack ground down by



sordid booksellers ; the starving occupant of successive garrets. This is the aspect of Goldsmith's career which naturally attracts Mr. Forster. Mr. Forster seems to have been haunted throughout his life by the idea that Providence had some especial spite against literary persons ; and that, in a measure to compensate them for their sad lot, society should be very kind to them, while the Government of the day might make them Companions of the Bath or give them posts in the Civil Service. In the otherwise copious, thorough, and valuable *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, we find an almost humiliating instance on the complaint that Oliver Goldsmith did not receive greater recognition and larger sums of money from his contemporaries. Goldsmith is here "the poor neglected sizar ;" his "marked ill-fortune" attends him constantly ; he shares "the evil destinies of men of letters ;" he was one of those who "struggled into fame without the aid of English institutions ;" in short, "he wrote and paid the penalty." Nay, even Christianity itself is impeached on account of the persecution suffered by poor Goldsmith. "There had been a Christian religion extant for seventeen hundred and fifty-seven years," writes Mr. Forster, "the world having been acquainted, for even so long, with its spiritual necessities and responsibilities ; yet here, in the middle of the eighteenth century, was the eminence ordinarily conceded to a spiritual teacher, to one of those men who come upon the earth to lift their fellow-men above its miry ways. He is up in a garret, writing for bread he cannot get, and dunned for a milk-score he cannot pay." That Christianity might have been worse employed than in paying the milkman's score is true enough, for then the milkman would have come by his own ; but that Christianity, or the state, or society should be scolded because an author suffers the natural consequences of his allowing his expenditure to exceed his income, seems a little hard. And this is a sort of writing that is peculiarly inappropriate in the case of Goldsmith, who, if ever any man was author of his own misfortunes, may fairly have the charge brought against him. "Men of genius," says Mr. Forster, "can more easily starve, than the world, with safety to itself, can continue to neglect and starve them." Perhaps so ; but the English nation, which has always had a regard and even love for Oliver Goldsmith, that is quite peculiar in the history of literature, and which has been glad to overlook his faults and follies, and eager to sympathize with him in the many miseries of his career, will be slow to believe that it is responsible for any starvation that Goldsmith may have endured.

However, the key-note has been firmly struck, and it still vibrates. Goldsmith was the unluckiest of mortals, the hapless victim of circumstances. "Yielding to that united pressure of labour, penury, and sorrow, with a frame exhausted by unremitting and ill-rewarded drudgery, Goldsmith was indebted to the forbearance of creditors for

a peaceful burial." But what, now, if some foreigner strange to the traditions of English literature—some Japanese student, for example, or the New Zealander come before his time—were to go over the ascertained facts of Goldsmith's life, and were suddenly to announce to us, with the happy audacity of ignorance, that he, Goldsmith, was a quite exceptionally fortunate person? "Why," he might say, "I find that in a country where the vast majority of people are born to labour, Oliver Goldsmith was never asked to do a stroke of work towards the earning of his own living until he had arrived at man's estate. All that was expected of him, as a youth and as a young man, was that he should equip himself fully for the battle of life. He was maintained at college until he had taken his degree. Again and again he was furnished with funds for further study and foreign travel; and again and again he gambled his opportunities away. The constant kindness of his uncle only made him the best begging-letter-writer the world has seen. In the the midst of his debt and distress as a bookseller's drudge, he receives £400 for three nights' performance of *The Good-natured man*; he immediately purchases chambers in Brick Court for £400; and forthwith begins to borrow as before. It is true that he died owing £2000, and was indebted to the forbearance of creditors for a peaceful burial; but it appears that during the last seven years of his life he had been earning an annual income equivalent to £800 of English currency.\* He was a man liberally and affectionately brought up, who had many relatives and many friends, and who had the proud satisfaction—which has been denied to many men of genius—of knowing for years before he died that his merits as a writer had been recognized by the great bulk of his countrymen. And yet this strange English nation is inclined to suspect that it treated him rather badly; and Christianity is attacked because it did not pay Goldsmith's milk-score."

Our Japanese friend may be exaggerating; but his position is, after all, fairly tenable. It may at least be looked at, before entering on the following brief *résumé* of the leading facts in Goldsmith's life, if only to restore our equanimity. For, naturally, it is not pleasant to think that any previous generation, however neglectful of the claims of literary persons (as compared with the claims of such wretched creatures as physicians, men of science, artists, engineers, and so forth) should so cruelly have ill-treated one whom we all love now. This inheritance of ingratitude is more than we can bear. Is it true that Goldsmith was so harshly dealt with by those barbarian ancestors of ours?

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\* The calculation is Lord Macaulay's: see his *Biographical Essays*.

## CHAPTER II.

## SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.

THE Goldsmiths were of English descent ; Goldsmith's father was a Protestant clergyman in a poor little village in the county of Longford ; and when Oliver, one of several children, was born in this village of Pallas, or Pallasmore, on the 10th of November, 1728, the Rev. Charles Goldsmith was passing rich on £40 a year. But a couple of years later Mr. Goldsmith succeeded to a more lucrative living ; and forthwith removed his family to the village of Lissoy, in the county of Westmeath.

Here at once our interest in the story begins : is this Lissoy the sweet Auburn that we have known and loved since our childhood ? Lord Macaulay, with a great deal of vehemence, avers that it is not ; that there never was any such hamlet as Auburn in Ireland ; that *The Deserted Village* is a hopelessly incongruous poem ; and that Goldsmith, in combining a description of a probably Kentish village with a description of an Irish ejectment, " has produced something which never was, and never will be, seen in any part of the world." This criticism is ingenious and plausible, but it is unsound, for it happens to overlook one of the radical facts of human nature—the magnifying delight of the mind in what is long remembered and remote. What was it that the imagination of Goldsmith, in his life-long banishment, could not see when he looked back to the home of his childhood, and his early friends, and the sports and occupations of his youth ? Lissoy was no doubt a poor enough Irish village ; and perhaps the farms were not too well cultivated ; and perhaps the village preacher, who was so dear to all the country round, had to administer many a thrashing to a certain graceless son of his ; and perhaps Paddy Byrne was something of a pedant ; and no doubt pigs ran over the " nicely sand-ed floor " of the inn ; and no doubt the village statesmen occasionally indulged in a free fight. But do you think that was the Lissoy that Goldsmith thought of in his dreary lodgings in Fleet-street courts ? No. It was the Lissoy where the vagrant lad had first seen the " primrose peep beneath the thorn ; " where he had listened to the mysterious call of the bittern by the unfrequented river ; it was a Lissoy still ringing with the glad laughter of young people in the twilight hours ; it was a Lissoy forever beautiful, and tender, and far away. The grown-up Goldsmith had not to go to any Kentish village for a model ; the familiar scenes of his youth, regarded with all the wistfulness and longing of an exile, became glorified enough. " If I go to the opera where Signora Colomba pours out all the mazes of melody," he writes to Mr. Hodson, " I sit and sigh for Lissoy's fireside, and *Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night* from Peggy Golden."



There was but little in the circumstances of Goldsmith's early life likely to fit him for, or to lead him into, a literary career ; in fact, he did not take to literature until he had tried pretty nearly every thing else as a method of earning a living. If he was intended for any thing, it was no doubt his father's wish that he should enter the Church ; and he got such education as the poor Irish clergyman—who was not a very provident person—could afford. The child Goldsmith was first of all taught his alphabet at home, by a maid-servant, who was also a relation of the family ; then, at the age of six, he was sent to that village school which, with its profound and learned master, he has made familiar to all of us ; and after that he was sent further a-field for his learning, being moved from this to the other boarding-school as the occasion demanded. Goldsmith's school-life could not have been altogether a pleasant time for him. We hear, indeed, of his being concerned in a good many frolics—robbing orchards, and the like ; and it is said that he attained proficiency in the game of fives. But a shy and sensitive lad like Goldsmith, who was eagerly desirous of being thought well of, and whose appearance only invited the thoughtless but cruel ridicule of his schoolmates, must have suffered a good deal. He was little, pitted with the small-pox, and awkward ; and school-boys are amazingly frank. He was not strong enough to thrash them into respect of him ; he had no big brother to become his champion ; his pocket-money was not lavish enough to enable him to buy over enemies or subsidize allies.

In similar circumstances it has sometimes happened that a boy physically inferior to his companions has consoled himself by proving his mental prowess—has scored off his failure at cricket by the taking of prizes, and has revenged himself for a drubbing by writing a lampoon. But even this last resource was not open to Goldsmith. He was a dull boy ; “a stupid, heavy blockhead,” is Dr. Streaun's phrase in summing up the estimate formed of young Goldsmith by his contemporaries at school. Of course, as soon as he became famous, everybody began to hunt up recollections of his having said or done this or that, in order to prove that there were signs of the coming greatness. People began to remember that he had been suspected of scribbling verses, which he burned. What schoolboy has not done the like ? We know how the biographers of great painters point out to us that their hero early showed the bent of his mind by drawing the figures of animals on doors and walls with a piece of chalk ; as to which it may be observed that, if every schoolboy who scribbled verses and sketched in chalk on a brick wall were to grow up a genius, poems and pictures would be plentiful enough. However, there is the apparently authenticated anecdote of young Goldsmith's turning the tables on the fiddler at his uncle's dancing-party. The fiddler, struck by the odd look of the boy, who was capering about the room, called out “Æsop !” whereupon Goldsmith is said to have instantly replied,

“ Our herald hath proclaimed this saying,  
See Æsop dancing and his monkey playing ! ”

But even if this story be true, it is worth nothing as an augury ; for quickness of repartee was precisely the accomplishment which the adult Goldsmith conspicuously lacked. Put a pen into his hand, and shut him up in a room : then he was master of the situation—nothing could be more incisive, polished, and easy than his playful sarcasm. But in society any fool could get the better of him by a sudden question followed by a horse-laugh. All through his life—even after he had become one of the most famous of living writers—Goldsmith suffered from want of self-confidence. He was too anxious to please. In his eager acquiescence he would blunder into any trap that was laid for him. A grain or two of the stolid self-sufficiency of the blockheads who laughed at him would not only have improved his character, but would have considerably added to the happiness of his life.

As a natural consequence of this timidity, Goldsmith, when opportunity served, assumed airs of magnificent importance. Every one knows the story of the mistake on which *She Stoops to Conquer* is founded. Getting free at last from all the turmoil, and anxieties, and mortifications of school-life, and returning home on a lent hack, the released schoolboy is feeling very grand indeed. He is now sixteen, would fain pass for a man, and has a whole golden guinea in his pocket. And so he takes the journey very leisurely until, getting benighted in a certain village, he asks the way to the “ best house,” and is directed by a facetious person to the house of the squire. The squire by good luck falls in with the joke ; and then we have a very pretty comedy indeed—the impecunious schoolboy playing the part of a fine gentleman on the strength of his solitary guinea, ordering a bottle of wine after his supper, and inviting his landlord and his landlord’s wife and daughter to join him in the supper-room. The contrast, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, between Marlow’s embarrassed diffidence on certain occasions and his audacious effrontery on others, found many a parallel in the incidents of Goldsmith’s own life ; and it is not improbable that the writer of the comedy was thinking of some of his own experiences when he made Miss Hardcastle say to her timid suitor : “ A want of courage upon some occasions assumes the appearance of ignorance, and betrays us when we most want to excel.”

It was, perhaps, just as well that the supper, and bottle of wine, and lodging at Squire Featherston’s had not to be paid for out of the schoolboy’s guinea ; for young Goldsmith was now on his way to college, and the funds at the disposal of the Goldsmith family were not over-abundant. Goldsmith’s sister having married the son of a well-to-do man, her father considered it a point of honour that she

should have a dowry ; and in giving her a sum of £400 he so crippled the means of the family, that Goldsmith had to be sent to college not as a pensioner but as a sizar. It appears that the young gentleman's pride revolted against this proposal ; and that he was won over to consent only by the persuasions of his uncle Contarine, who himself had been a sizar. So Goldsmith, now in his eighteenth year, went to Dublin ; managed somehow or other—though he was the last in the list—to pass the necessary examination ; and entered upon his college career (1745).

How he lived, and what he learned, at Trinity College, are both largely matters of conjecture ; the chief features of such record as we have are the various means of raising a little money to which the poor sizar had to resort ; a continual quarrelling with his tutor, an ill-conditioned brute, who baited Goldsmith and occasionally beat him ; and a chance frolic when funds were forthcoming. It was while he was at Trinity College that his father died ; so that Goldsmith was rendered more than ever dependent on the kindness of his uncle Contarine, who throughout seems to have taken much interest in his odd, ungainly nephew. A loan from a friend or a visit to the pawnbroker tided over the severer difficulties ; and then from time to time the writing of street-ballads, for which he got five shillings a-piece at a certain repository, came in to help. It was a happy-go-lucky, hand-to-mouth sort of existence, involving a good deal of hardship and humiliation, but having its frolics and gayeties notwithstanding. One of these was pretty near to putting an end to his collegiate career altogether. He had, smarting under a public admonition of having been concerned in a riot, taken seriously to his studies and had competed for a scholarship. He missed the scholarship, but gained an exhibition of the value of thirty shillings ; whereupon he collected a number of friends of both sexes in his rooms, and proceeded to have high jinks there. In the midst of the dancing and uproar, in comes his tutor, in such a passion that he knocks Goldsmith down. This insult, received before his friends, was too much for the unlucky sizar, who, the very next day, sold his books, ran away from college, and ultimately, after having been on the verge of starvation once or twice, made his way to Lissoy. Here his brother got hold of him, persuaded him to go back, and the escapade was condoned somehow. Goldsmith remained at Trinity College until he took his degree (1749). He was again lowest in the list ; but still he passed ; and he must have learned something. He was now twenty-one, with all the world before him ; and the question was as to how he was to employ such knowledge as he had acquired.



## CHAPTER III.

## IDLENESS AND FOREIGN TRAVEL.

BUT Goldsmith was not in any hurry to acquire either wealth or fame. He had a happy knack of enjoying the present hour—especially when there were one or two boon companions with him, and a pack of cards to be found—and, after his return to his mother's house, he appears to have entered upon the business of idleness with much philosophical satisfaction. If he was not quite such an unlettered clown as he has described in Tony Lumpkin, he had at least all Tony Lumpkin's high spirits and love of joking and idling; and he was surrounded at the ale-house by just such a company of admirers as used to meet at the famous Three Pigeons. Sometimes he helped in his brother's school; sometimes he went errands for his mother; occasionally he would sit and meditatively play the flute—for the day was to be passed somehow; then in the evening came the assemblage in Conway's inn, with the glass, and the pipe, and the cards, and the uproarious jest or song. "But Scripture saith an ending to all fine things must be," and the friends of this jovial young "buckeen" began to tire of his idleness and his recurrent visits. They gave him hints that he might set about doing something to provide himself with a living; and the first thing that they thought of was that he should go into the Church—perhaps as a sort of purification-house after George Conway's inn. Accordingly Goldsmith, who appears to have been the most good-natured and compliant youth, did make application to the Bishop of Elphin. There is some doubt about the precise reasons which induced the Bishop to decline Goldsmith's application, but at any rate the Church was denied the aid of the young man's eloquence and erudition. Then he tried teaching, and through the good offices of his uncle he obtained a tutorship which he held for a considerable time—long enough, indeed, to enable him to amass a sum of thirty pounds. When he quarrelled with his patron, and once more "took the world for his pillow," as the Gaelic stories say, he had this sum in his pocket and was possessed of a good horse.

He started away from Ballymahon, where his mother was now living, and he returned without the money, and on the back of a wretched animal, telling his mother a cock-and-bull story of the most amusing simplicity. "If Uncle Contarine believed those letters," says Mr. Thackeray "——if Oliver's mother believed that story which the youth related of his going to Cork, with the purpose of embarking for America; of his having paid his passage-money, and having sent his kit on board; of the anonymous captain sailing away with Oliver's valuable luggage, in a nameless ship, never to return—if Uncle Contarine and the mother at Ballymahon believed his stories, they must

have been a very simple pair ; as it was a very simple rogue indeed who cheated them." Indeed, if any one is anxious to fill up his hiatus in Goldsmith's life, the best thing he can do is to discard Goldsmith's suspicious record of his adventures, and put in its place the faithful record of the adventures of Mr. Barry Lyndon, when that modest youth left his mother's house and rode to Dublin, with a certain number of guineas in his pocket. But whether Uncle Contarine believed the story or no, he was ready to give the young gentleman another chance ; and this time it was the legal profession that was chosen. Goldsmith got fifty pounds from his uncle, and reached Dublin. In a remarkably brief space of time he had gambled away the fifty pounds, and was on his way back to Ballymahon, where his mother's reception of him was not very cordial, though his uncle forgave him, and was once more ready to start him in life. But in what direction ? Teaching, the Church, and the law had lost their attractions for him. Well, this time it was medicine. In fact, any sort of project was capable of drawing forth the good old uncle's bounty. The funds were again forthcoming ; Goldsmith started for Edinburgh, and now (1752) saw Ireland for the last time.

He lived, and he informed his uncle that he studied, in Edinburgh for a year and a half ; at the end of which time it appeared to him that his knowledge of medicine would be much improved by foreign travel. There was Albinus, for example, "the great professor of Leyden," as he wrote to the credulous uncle, from whom he would doubtless learn much. When, having got another twenty pounds for travelling expenses, he did reach Leyden (1754), he mentioned Gaubius, the chemical professor. Gaubius is also a good name. That this intercourse with these learned persons, and the serious nature of his studies, were not incompatible with a little light relaxation in the way of gambling is not impossible. On one occasion, it is said, he was so lucky that he came to a fellow-student with his pockets full of money ; and was induced to resolve never to play again—a resolution broken about as soon as made. Of course he lost all his winnings, and more ; and had to borrow a trifling sum to get himself out of the place. Then an incident occurs which is highly characteristic of the better side of Goldsmith's nature. He had just got this money and was about to leave Leyden, when, as Mr. Forster writes, "he passed a florist's garden on his return, and seeing some rare and high-priced flower, which his uncle Contarine, an enthusiast in such things, had often spoken and been in search of, he ran in without other thought than of immediate pleasure to his kindest friend, bought a parcel of the roots, and sent them off to Ireland." He had a guinea in his pocket when he started on the grand tour.

Of this notable period in Goldsmith's life (1755-6) very little is known, though a good deal has been guessed. A minute record of all the personal adventures that befell the wayfarer as he trudged from

country to country, a diary of the odd humours and fancies that must have occurred to him in his solitary pilgrimages, would be of quite inestimable value; but even the letters that Goldsmith wrote home from time to time are lost; while *The Traveller* consists chiefly of a series of philosophical reflections on the government of various states, more likely to have engaged the attention of a Fleet-street author, living in an atmosphere of books, than to have occupied the mind of a tramp anxious about his supper and his night's lodging. Boswell says he "disputed" his way through Europe. It is much more probable that he begged his way through Europe. The romantic version, which has been made the subject of many a charming picture, is that he was entertained by the peasantry whom he had delighted with his playing on the flute. It is quite probable that Goldsmith, whose imagination had been captivated by the story of how Baron von Holberg had as a young man really passed through France, Germany, and Holland in this Orpheus-like manner, may have put a flute in his pocket when he left Leyden; but it is far from safe to assume, as is generally done, that Goldsmith was himself the hero of the adventures described in Chapter XX. of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. It is the more to be regretted that we have no authentic record of these devious wanderings, that by this time Goldsmith had acquired, as is shown in other letters, a polished, easy, and graceful style, with a very considerable faculty of humorous observation. Those ingenious letters to his uncle (they usually included a little hint about money) were, in fact, a trifle too literary both in substance and in form; we could even now, looking at them with a pardonable curiosity, have spared a little of their formal antithesis for some more precise information about the writer and his surroundings.

The strangest thing about this strange journey all over Europe was the failure of Goldsmith to pick up even a common and ordinary acquaintance with the familiar facts of natural history. The ignorance on this point of the author of the *Animated Nature* was a constant subject of jest among Goldsmith's friends. They declared he could not tell the difference between any two sorts of barn-door fowl until he saw them cooked and on the table. But it may be said prematurely here that, even when he is wrong as to his facts or his sweeping generalizations, one is inclined to forgive him on account of the quaint gracefulness and point of his style. When Mr. Burchell says, "This rule seems to extend even to other animals: the little vermin race are ever treacherous, cruel, and cowardly, whilst those endowed with strength and power are generous, brave, and gentle," we scarcely stop to reflect that the merlin, which is not much bigger than a thrush, has an extraordinary courage and spirit, while the lion, if all stories be true, is, unless when goaded by hunger, an abject skulker. Elsewhere, indeed, in the *Animated Nature*, Goldsmith gives credit to the smaller birds for a good deal of valour, and then goes on to say, with a charm,



ing freedom, "but their contentions are sometimes of a gentler nature. Two male birds shall strive in song till, after a long struggle, the loudest shall entirely silence the other. During these contentions the female sits an attentive silent auditor, and often rewards the loudest songster with her company during the season." Yet even this description of the battle of the bards, with the queen of love as arbiter, is scarcely so amusing as his happy-go-lucky notions with regard to the variability of species. The philosopher, flute in hand, who went wandering from the canals of Holland to the ice-ribbed falls of the Rhine, may have heard from time to time that contest between singing-birds which he so imaginatively describes; but it was clearly the Fleet-street author, living among books, who arrived at the conclusion that intermarriage of species is common among small birds and rare among big birds. Quoting some lines of Addison's which express the belief that birds are a virtuous race—that the nightingale, for example, does not covet the wife of his neighbour, the blackbird—Goldsmith goes on to observe, "But whatever may be the poet's opinion, the probability is against this fidelity among the smaller tenants of the grove. The great birds are much more true to their species than these; and, of consequence, the varieties among them are more few. Of the ostrich, the cassowary, and the eagle there are but few species; and no arts that man can use could probably induce them to mix with each other."

What he did bring back from his foreign travels was a medical degree. Where he got it, and how he got it, are alike matters of pure conjecture; but it is extremely improbable that—whatever he might have been willing to write home from Padua or Louvain, in order to coax another remittance from his Irish friends—he would afterwards, in the presence of such men as Johnson, Burke, and Reynolds, wear sham honours. It is much more probable that, on his finding those supplies from Ireland running ominously short, the philosophic vagabond determined to prove to his correspondents that he was really at work somewhere, instead of merely idling away his time, begging or borrowing the wherewithal to pass him from town to town. That he did see something of the foreign universities is evident from his own writings; there are touches of description here and there which he could not well have got from books. With this degree, and with such book-learning and such knowledge of nature and human nature as he had chosen or managed to pick up during all those years, he was now called upon to begin life for himself. The Irish supplies stopped altogether. His letters were left unanswered. And so Goldsmith somehow or other got back to London (February 1, 1756), and had to cast about for some way of earning his daily bread.

## CHAPTER IV.

## EARLY STRUGGLES—HACK-WRITING.

HERE ensued a very dark period in his life. He was alone in London, without friends, without money, without introductions; his appearance was the reverse of prepossessing; and, even despite that medical degree and his acquaintance with the learned Albinus and the learned Gaubius, he had practically nothing of any value to offer for sale in the great labour-market of the world. How he managed to live at all is a mystery: it is certain that he must have endured a great deal of want; and one may well sympathize with so gentle and sensitive a creature reduced to such straits, without inquiring too curiously into the causes of his misfortunes. If, on the one hand, we cannot accuse society, or Christianity, or the English government of injustice and cruelty because Goldsmith had gambled away his chances and was now called on to pay the penalty, on the other hand, we had better, before blaming Goldsmith himself, inquire into the origin of those defects of character which produced such results. As this would involve an *excursus* into the controversy between Necessity and Free-will, probably most people would rather leave it alone. It may safely be said in any case that, while Goldsmith's faults and follies, of which he himself had to suffer the consequences, are patent enough, his character, on the whole, was distinctly a lovable one. Goldsmith was his own enemy, and everybody else's friend: that is not a serious indictment, as things go. He was quite well aware of his weaknesses; and he was also—it may be hinted—aware of the good-nature which he put forward as condonation. If some foreigner were to ask how it is that so thoroughly a commercial people as the English are—strict in the acknowledgment and payment of debt—should have always betrayed a sneaking fondness for the character of the good-humoured scapegrace whose hand is in everybody's pocket, and who throws away other people's money with the most charming air in the world, Goldsmith might be pointed to as one of many literary teachers whose own circumstances were not likely to make them severe censors of the Charles Surfaces, or lenient judges of the Joseph Surfaces of the world. Be merry while you may; let to-morrow take care of itself; share your last guinea with any one, even if the poor drones of society—the butcher, and baker, and milkman with his score—have to suffer; do anything you like, so long as you keep the heart warm. All this is a delightful philosophy. It has its moments of misery—its periods of reaction—but it has its moments of high delight. When we are invited to contemplate the “evil destinies of men of letters,” we ought to be shown the flood-tides as well as the

ebb-tides. The tavern gayety; the brand-new coat and lace and sword; the midnight frolics, with jolly companions every one—these, however brief and intermittent, should not be wholly left out of the picture. Of course it is very dreadful to hear of poor Boyse lying in bed with nothing but a blanket over him, and with his arms thrust through two holes in the blanket, so that he could write—perhaps a continuation of his poem on the *Deity*. But then we should be shown Boyse when he was spending the money collected by Dr. Johnson to get the poor scribbler's clothes out of pawn; and we should also be shown him, with his hands through the holes in the blanket, enjoying the mushrooms and truffles on which, as a little garniture for "his last scrap of beef," he had just laid out his last half-guinea.

"There were but few truffles—probably there was but little beef—for Goldsmith during this sombre period. "His threadbare coat, his uncouth figure, and Hibernian dialect caused him to meet with repeated refusals." But at length he got some employment in a chemist's shop, and this was a start. Then he tried practising in a small way on his own account in Southwark. Here he made the acquaintance of a printer's workman; and through him he was engaged as a corrector of the press in the establishment of Mr. Samuel Richardson. Being so near to literature, he caught the infection; and naturally began with a tragedy. This tragedy was shown to the author of *Clarissa Harlowe*; but it only went the way of many similar first inspirings of the Muse. Then Goldsmith drifted to Peckham, where we find him (1757) installed as usher at Dr. Milner's school. Goldsmith as usher has been the object of much sympathy; and he would certainly deserve it, if we are to assume that his description of an usher's position in the *Bee*, and in George Primrose's advice to his cousin, was a full and accurate description of his life at Peckham. "Browbeat by the master, hated for my ugly face by the mistress, worried by the boys"—if that was his life, he was much to be pitied. But we cannot believe it. The Milners were exceedingly kind to Goldsmith. It was at the intercession of young Milner, who had been his fellow-student at Edinburgh, that Goldsmith got the situation, which at all events kept him out of the reach of immediate want. It was through the Milners that he was introduced to Griffiths, who gave him a chance of trying a literary career—as a hack-writer of reviews and so forth. When, having got tired of that, Goldsmith was again floating vaguely on the waves of chance, where did he find a harbour but in that very school at Peckham? And we have the direct testimony of the youngest of Dr. Milner's daughters, that this Irish usher of theirs was a remarkably cheerful and even facetious person, constantly playing tricks and practical jokes, amusing the boys by telling stories and by performances on the flute, living a careless life, and always in advance of his salary. Any beggars, or group of children, even the very boys who played back practical



jokes on him, were welcome to a share of what small funds he had ; and we all know how Mrs. Milner good-naturedly said one day, " You had better, Mr. Goldsmith, let me keep your money for you, as I do for some of the young gentlemen ; and how he answered with much simplicity, " In truth, Madam, there is equal need." With Goldsmith's love of approbation and extreme sensitiveness, he no doubt suffered deeply from many slights, now as at other times ; but what we know of his life in the Peckham school does not incline us to believe that it was an especially miserable period of his existence. His abundant cheerfulness does not seem to have at any time deserted him ; and what with tricks, and jokes, and playing of the flute, the dull routine of instructing the unruly young gentlemen at Dr. Milner's was got through somehow.

When Goldsmith left the Peckham school to try hackwriting in Paternoster Row, he was going further to fare worse. Griffiths the bookseller, when he met Goldsmith at Dr. Milner's dinner-table and invited him to become a reviewer, was doing a service to the English nation—for it was in this period of machine-work that Goldsmith discovered that happy faculty of literary expression that led to the composition of his masterpieces—but he was doing little immediate service to Goldsmith.

The newly-captured hack was boarded and lodged at Griffiths' house in Paternoster Row (1757) ; he was to have a small salary in consideration of remorselessly constant work ; and—what was the hardest condition of all—he was to have his writings revised by Mrs. Griffiths. Mr. Forster justly remarks that though at last Goldsmith had thus become a man of letters, he " had gratified no passion and attained no object of ambition." He had taken to literature, as so many others have done, merely as a last resource. And if it is true that literature at first treated Goldsmith harshly, made him work hard, and gave him comparatively little for what he did, at least it must be said that his experience was not a singular one. Mr. Forster says that literature was at that time in a transition state : " The patron was gone, and the public had not come." But when Goldsmith began to do better than hack-work, he found a public speedily enough. If, as Lord Macaulay computes, Goldsmith received in the last seven years of his life what was equivalent to £5600 of our money, even the villain booksellers cannot be accused of having starved him. At the outset of his literary career he received no large sums, for he had achieved no reputation ; but he got the market-rate for his work. We have around us at this moment plenty of hacks who do not earn much more than their board and lodging with a small salary.

For the rest, we have no means of knowing whether Goldsmith got through his work with ease or with difficulty ; but it is obvious, looking over the reviews which he is believed to have written for

Griffiths' magazine, that he readily acquired the professional critic's airs of superiority, along with a few tricks of the trade, no doubt taught him by Griffiths. Several of these reviews, for example, are merely epitomes of the contents of the books reviewed, with some vague suggestion that the writer might, if he had been less careful, have done worse, and, if he had been more careful, might have done better. Who does not remember how the philosophic vagabond was taught to become a cognoscento? "The whole secret consisted in a strict adherence to two rules: the one always to observe that the picture might have been better if the painter had taken more pains; and the other to praise the works of Pietro Perugino." It is amusing to observe the different estimates formed of the function of criticism by Goldsmith the critic and by Goldsmith the author. Goldsmith, sitting at Griffiths' desk, naturally magnifies his office, and announces his opinion that "to direct our taste, and conduct the poet up to perfection, has ever been the true critic's province." But Goldsmith the author, when he comes to inquire into the existing state of Polite Learning in Europe, finds in criticism not a help but a danger. It is "the natural destroyer of polite learning." And again, in the *Citizen of the World*, he exclaims against the pretensions of the critic. "If any choose to be critics, it is but saying they are critics; and from that time forward they become invested with full power and authority over every caitiff who aims at their instruction or entertainment."

This at least may be said, that in these early essays contributed to the *Monthly Review* there is much more of Goldsmith the critic than of Goldsmith the author. They are somewhat laboured performances. They are almost devoid of the sly and delicate humour that afterwards marked Goldsmith's best prose work. We find throughout his trick of antithesis; but here it is forced and formal, whereas afterwards he lent to this habit of writing the subtle surprise of epigram. They have the true manner of authority, nevertheless. He says of Home's *Douglas*: "Those parts of nature, and that rural simplicity with which the author was, perhaps, best acquainted, are not unhappily described; and hence we are led to conjecture that a more universal knowledge of nature will probably increase his powers of description." If the author had written otherwise, he would have written differently; had he known more, he would not have been so ignorant; the tragedy is a tragedy, but why did not the author make it a comedy?—this sort of criticism has been heard of even in our own day. However, Goldsmith pounded away at his newly-found work, under the eye of the exacting bookseller and his learned wife. We find him dealing with Scandinavian (here called Celtic) mythology, though he does not adventure on much comment of his own; then he engages Smollett's *History of England*, but mostly in the way of extract; anon we find him reviewing *A Journal of Eight Days' Journey*, by Jonas Hanway,

of whom Johnson said that he made some reputation by travelling abroad, and lost it all by travelling at home. Then again we find him writing a disquisition on *Some Inquiries concerning the First Inhabitants, Language, Religion, Learning, and Letters of Europe*, by a Mr. Wise, who, along with his critic, appears to have got into hopeless confusion in believing Basque and Armorican to be the remains of the same ancient language. The last phrase of a note appended to this review by Goldsmith probably indicates his own humble estimate of his work at this time. "It is more our business," he says, "to exhibit the opinions of the learned than to controvert them." In fact, he was employed to boil down books for people who did not wish to spend more on literature than the price of a magazine. Though he was new to the trade, it is probable he did it as well as any other.

At the end of five months, Goldsmith and Griffiths quarrelled and separated. Griffiths said Goldsmith was idle; Goldsmith said Griffiths was impertinent; probably the editorial supervision exercised by Mrs. Griffiths had something to do with the dire contention. From Paternoster Row Goldsmith removed to a garret in Fleet Street; had his letters addressed to a coffee-house; and apparently supported himself by further hack-work, his connection with Griffiths not being quite severed. Then he drifted back to Peckham again; and was once more installed as usher, Dr. Milner being in especial want of an assistant at this time. Goldsmith's lingering about the gates of literature had not inspired him with any great ambition to enter the enchanted land. But at the same time he thought he saw in literature a means by which a little ready money might be made, in order to help him on to something more definite and substantial; and this goal was now put before him by Dr. Milner, in the shape of a medical appointment on the Coromandel coast. It was in the hope of obtaining this appointment that he set about composing that *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, which is now interesting to us as the first of his more ambitious works. As the book grew under his hands, he began to cast about for subscribers; and from the Fleet-street coffee-house—he had again left the Peckham school—he addressed to his friends and relatives a series of letters of the most charming humour, which might have drawn subscriptions from a millstone. To his brother-in-law, Mr. Hodson, he sent a glowing account of the great fortune in store for him on the Coromandel coast. "The salary is but trifling," he writes, "namely, £100 per annum, but the other advantages, if a person be prudent, are considerable. The practice of the place, if I am rightly informed, generally amounts to not less than £1000 per annum, for which the appointed physician has an exclusive privilege. This, with the advantages resulting from trade, and the high interest which money bears, viz., £20 per cent., are the inducements which persuade me to undergo the fatigues of sea, the



dangers of war, and the still greater dangers of the climate ; which induce me to leave a place where I am every day gaining friends and esteem, and where I might enjoy all the conveniences of life."

The surprising part of this episode in Goldsmith's life is that he did really receive the appointment ; in fact, he was called upon to pay £10 for the appointment-warrant. In this emergency he went to the proprietor of the *Critical Review*, the rival of the *Monthly*, and obtained some money for certain anonymous work which need not be mentioned in detail here. He also moved into another garret, this time in Green-Arbor Court, Fleet Street, in a wilderness of slums. The Coromandel project, however, on which so many hopes had been built, fell through. No explanation of the collapse could be got from either Goldsmith himself or from Dr. Milner. Mr. Forster suggests that Goldsmith's inability to raise money for his outfit may have been made the excuse for transferring the appointment to another ; and that is probable enough ; but it is also probable that the need for such an excuse was based on the discovery that Goldsmith was not properly qualified for the post. And this seems the more likely, that Goldsmith immediately afterwards resolved to challenge examination at Surgeon's Hall. He undertook to write four articles for the *Monthly Review* ; Griffiths became surety to a tailor for a fine suit of clothes ; and, thus equipped, Goldsmith presented himself at Surgeon's Hall. He only wanted to be passed as hospital mate ; but even that modest ambition was unfulfilled. He was found not qualified, and returned, with his fine clothes, to his Fleet-street den. He was now thirty years of age (1758) ; and had found no definite occupation in the world.

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## CHAPTER V.

### BEGINNING OF AUTHORSHIP—THE BEE.

DURING the period that now ensued, and amid much quarelling with Griffiths and hack-writing for the *Critical Review*, Goldsmith managed to get his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* completed ; and it is from the publication of that work, on the 2d of April, 1759, that we may date the beginning of Goldsmith's career as an author. The book was published anonymously ; but Goldsmith was not at all anxious to disclaim the parentage of his first-born ; and in Grub Street and its environs, at least, the authorship of the book was no secret. Moreover, there was that in it which was likely to provoke the literary tribe to plenty of fierce talking. The *Enquiry* is neither more nor less than an endeavour to prove that criticism has in all ages been the deadly enemy of art and literature,

coupled with an appeal to authors to draw their inspiration from nature rather than from books, and varied here and there by a gentle sigh over the loss of that patronage, in the sunshine of which men of genius were wont to bask. Goldsmith, not having been an author himself, could not have suffered much at the hands of the critics ; so that it is not to be supposed that personal feeling dictated this fierce onslaught on the whole tribe of critics, compilers, and commentators. They are represented to us as rank weeds growing up to choke all manifestations of true art. "Ancient learning," we are told at the outset, "may be distinguished into three periods : its commencement, or the age of poets ; its maturity, or the age of philosophers ; and its decline, or the age of critics." Then our guide carries us into the dark ages ; and, with lantern in hand, shows us the creatures swarming there in the sluggish pools—"commentators, compilers, polemic divines, and intricate metaphysicians." We come to Italy : Look at the affectations with which the Virtuosi and Filosofi have enchained the free spirit of poetry. "Poetry is no longer among them an imitation of what we see, but of what a visionary might wish. The zephyr breathes the most exquisite perfume ; the trees wear eternal verdure ; fawns, and dryads, and hamadryads, stand ready to fan the sultry shepherdess, who has forgot, indeed, the prettiness with which Guarini's shepherdesses have been reproached, but it is so simple and innocent as often to have no meaning. Happy country, where the pastoral age begins to revive !—where the wits even of Rome are united into a rural group of nymphs and swains, under the appellation of modern Arcadians !—where in the midst of porticoes, processions, and cavalades, abbés turned shepherds and shepherdesses without sheep indulge their innocent *divertimenti* !"

In Germany the ponderous volumes of the commentators next come in for animadversion ; and here we find an epigram, the quaint simplicity of which is peculiarly characteristic of Goldsmith. "Were angels to write books," he remarks, "they never would write folios." But Germany gets credit for the money spent by her potentates on learned institutions ; and it is perhaps England that is delicately hinted at in these words : "Had the fourth part of the immense sum above mentioned been given in proper rewards to genius, in some neighbouring countries, it would have rendered the name of the donor immortal, and added to the real interests of society." Indeed, when we come to England, we find that men of letters are in a bad way, owing to the prevalence of critics, the tyranny of booksellers, and the absence of patrons. The author, when unpatronized by the great, has naturally recourse to the bookseller. There cannot perhaps be imagined a combination, more prejudicial to taste than this. It is the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much as possible. Accordingly, tedious compilations and periodical magazines are the result of their joint endeavours. In these cir-

circumstances the author bids adieu to fame, writes for bread, and for that only. Imagination is seldom called in. He sits down to address the venal muse with the most phlegmatic apathy ; and, as we are told of the Russian, courts his mistress by falling asleep in her lap. His reputation never spreads in a wider circle than that of the trade, who generally value him, not for the fineness of his compositions, but the quantity he works off in a given time.

“ A long habit of writing for bread thus turns the ambition of every author at last into avarice. He finds that he has written many years, that the public are scarcely acquainted even with his name ; he despairs of applause, and turns to profit, which invites him. He finds that money procures all those advantages, that respect, and that ease which he vainly expected from fame. Thus the man who, under the protection of the great, might have done honour to humanity, when only patronized by the bookseller, becomes a thing little superior to the fellow who works at the press.”

Nor was he afraid to attack the critics of his own day, though he knew that the two Reviews for which he had recently been writing would have something to say about his own *Enquiry*. This is how he disposes of the *Critical* and the *Monthly* : “ We have two literary Reviews in London, with critical newspapers and magazines without number. The compilers of these resemble the commoners of Rome ; they are all for levelling property, not by increasing their own, but by diminishing that of others. The man who has any good-nature in his disposition must, however, be somewhat displeased to see distinguished reputations often the sport of ignorance—to see, by one false pleasantry, the future peace of a worthy man’s life disturbed, and this only because he has unsuccessfully attempted to instruct or amuse us. Though ill-nature is far from being wit, yet it is generally laughed at as such. The critic enjoys the triumph, and ascribes to his parts what is only due to his effrontery. I fire with indignation when I see persons wholly destitute of education and genius indent to the press, and thus turn book-makers, adding to the sin of criticism the sin of ignorance also ; whose trade is a bad one, and who are bad workmen in the trade.” Indeed there was a good deal of random hitting in the *Enquiry*, which was sure to provoke resentment. Why, for example, should he have gone out of his way to insult the highly respectable class of people who excel in mathematical studies ? “ This seems a science,” he observes, “ to which the meanest intellects are equal. I forget who it is that says, ‘ All men might understand mathematics if they would.’ ” There was also in the first edition of the *Enquiry* a somewhat ungenerous attack on stage-managers, actors, actresses, and theatrical things in general ; but this was afterwards wisely excised. It is not to be wondered at that, on the whole, the *Enquiry* should have been severely handled in certain quarters. Smollett, who reviewed it in the *Critical Review*, appears to have kept his tem-



per pretty well for a Scotchman ; but Kenrick, a hack employed by Griffiths to maltreat the book in the *Monthly Review*, flourished his bludgeon in a brave manner. The coarse personalities and malevolent insinuations of this bully no doubt hurt Goldsmith considerably ; but, as we look at them now, they are only remarkable for their dullness. If Griffiths had had another Goldsmith to reply to Goldsmith, the retort would have been better worth reading ; one can imagine the playful sarcasm that would have been dealt out to this new writer, who, in the very act of protesting against criticism, proclaimed himself a critic. But Goldsmiths are not always to be had when wanted ; while Kenricks can be bought at any moment for a guinea or two a head.

Goldsmith had not chosen literature as the occupation of his life ; he had only fallen back on it when other projects failed. But it is quite possible that now, as he began to take up some slight position as an author, the old ambition of distinguishing himself—which had flickered before his imagination from time to time—began to enter into his calculations along with the more pressing business of earning a livelihood. And he was soon to have an opportunity of appealing to a wider public than could have been expected for that erudite treatise on the arts of Europe. Mr. Wilkie, a bookseller in St. Paul's Church-yard, proposed to start a weekly magazine, price threepence, to contain essays, short stories, letters on the topics of the day, and so forth, more or less after the manner of the *Spectator*. He asked Goldsmith to become sole contributor. Here, indeed, was a very good opening ; for, although there were many magazines in the field, the public had just then a fancy for literature in small doses ; while Goldsmith, in entering into the competition, would not be hampered by the dullness of collaborators. He closed with Wilkie's offer ; and on the 6th of October, 1759, appeared the first number of the *Bee*.

For us now there is a curious autobiographical interest in the opening sentences of the first number ; but surely even the public of the day must have imagined that the new writer who was now addressing them was not to be confounded with the common herd of magazine-hacks. What could be more delightful than this odd mixture of modesty, humour, and an anxious desire to please ?—"There is not, perhaps, a more whimsically dismal figure in nature than a man of real modesty ; who assumes an air of impudence—who, while his heart beats with anxiety, studies ease and affects good-humour. In this situation, however, a periodical writer often finds himself upon his first attempt to address the public in form. All his power of pleasing is damped by solicitude, and his cheerfulness dashed with apprehension. Impressed with the terrors of the tribunal before which he is going to appear, his natural humour turns to pertness, and for real wit he is obliged to substitute vivacity. His first publication draws a crowd ; they part dissatisfied ; and the author, never more to be indulged with

a favourable hearing, is left to condemn the indelicacy of his own address or their want of discernment. For my part, as I was never distinguished for address, and have often even blundered in making my bow, such bodings as these had like to have totally repressed my ambition. I was at a loss whether to give the public specious promises, or give none; whether to be merry or sad on this solemn occasion. If I should decline all merit, it was too probable the hasty reader might have taken me at my word. If, on the other hand, like labourers in the magazine trade, I had, with modest impudence, humbly presumed to promise an epitome of all the good things that ever were said or written, this might have disgusted those readers I most desire to please. Had I been merry, I might have been censured as vastly low; and had I been sorrowful, I might have been left to mourn in solitude and silence; in short, whichever way I turned, nothing presented but prospects of terror, despair, chandlers' shops, and waste paper."

And it is just possible that if Goldsmith had kept to this vein of familiar *causerie*, the public might in time have been attracted by its quaintness. But no doubt Mr. Wilkie would have stared aghast; and so we find Goldsmith, as soon as his introductory bow is made, setting seriously about the business of magazine-making. Very soon, however, both Mr. Wilkie and his editor perceived that the public had not been taken by their venture. The chief cause of the failure, as it appears to any one who looks over the magazine now, would seem to be the lack of any definite purpose. There was no marked feature to arrest public attention, while many things were discarded on which the popularity of other periodicals had been based. There was no scandal to appeal to the key-hole and back-door element in human nature; there were no libels and gross personalities to delight the mean and envious; there were no fine airs of fashion to charm milliners anxious to know how the great talked, and posed, and dressed; and there was no solemn and pompous erudition to impress the minds of those serious and sensible people who buy literature as they buy butter—by its weight. At the beginning of No. IV. he admits that the new magazine has not been a success, and, in doing so, returns to that vein of whimsical, personal humour with which he had started: "Were I to measure the merit of my present undertaking by its success or the rapidity of its sale, I might be led to form conclusions by no means favourable to the pride of an author. Should I estimate my fame by its extent, every newspaper and magazine would leave me far behind. Their fame is diffused in a very wide circle—that of some as far as Islington, and some yet farther still; while mine, I sincerely believe, has hardly travelled beyond the sound of Bow Bell; and, while the works of others fly like unpinioned swans, I find my own move as heavily as a new-plucked goose. Still, however, I have as much pride as they who have ten times as many readers. It is impossible to repeat all the agreeable delusions in which a disappointed author is

apt to find comfort. I conclude, that what my reputation wants in extent is made up by its solidity. *Minus juvat gloria lata quam magna.* I have great satisfaction in considering the delicacy and discernment of those readers I have, and in ascribing my want of popularity to the ignorance or inattention of those I have not. All the world may forsake an author, but vanity will never forsake him. Yet, notwithstanding so sincere a confession, I was once induced to show my indignation against the public by discontinuing my endeavours to please; and was bravely resolved, like Raleigh, to vex them by burning my manuscript in a passion. Upon recollection, however, I considered what set or body of people would be displeased at my rashness. The sun, after so sad an accident, might shine next morning as bright as usual; men might laugh and sing the next day and transact business as before, and not a single creature feel any regret but myself."

Goldsmith was certainly more at home in this sort of writing than in gravely lecturing people against the vice of gambling; in warning tradesmen how ill it became them to be seen at races; in demonstrating that justice is a higher virtue than generosity; and in proving that the avaricious are the true benefactors of society. But even as he confesses the failure of his new magazine, he seems determined to show the public what sort of writer this is, whom as yet they have not regarded too favourably. It is in No. IV. of the *Bee* that the famous *City Night Piece* occurs. No doubt that strange little fragment of description was the result of some sudden and aimless fancy, striking the occupant of the lonely garret in the middle of the night. The present tense, which he seldom used—and the abuse of which is one of the detestable vices of modern literature—adds to the mysterious solemnity of the recital:

"The clock has just struck two, the expiring taper rises and sinks in the socket, the watchman forgets the hour in slumber, the laborious and the happy are at rest, and nothing wakes but meditation, guilt, revelry, and despair. The drunkard once more fills the destroying bowl, the robber walks his midnight round, and the suicide lifts his guilty arm against his own sacred person.

"Let me no longer waste the night over the page of antiquity or the sallies of contemporary genius, but pursue the solitary walk, where Vanity, ever changing, but a few hours past walked before me—where she kept up the pageant, and now, like a forward child, seems hushed with her own importunities.

"What a gloom hangs all around! The dying lamp feebly emits a yellow gleam; no sound is heard but of the chiming clock or the distant watch-dog. All the bustle of human pride is forgotten; an hour like this may well display the emptiness of human vanity.

"There will come a time when this temporary solitude may be made continual, and the city itself, like its inhabitants, fade away, and leave a desert in its room.

"What cities, as great as this, have once triumphed in existence, had their victories as great, joy as just and as unbounded; and, with short-sighted presumption, promised themselves immortality! Posterity can hardly trace the situation of some; the sorrowful traveller wanders over the awful ruins of others; and, as he beholds, he learns wisdom, and feels the transience of every sublunary possession.



“ ‘Here,’ he cries, ‘stood their citadel, now grown over with weeds ; there their senate-house, but now the haunt of every noxious reptile ; temples and theatres stood here, now only an undistinguished heap of ruin. They are fallen, for luxury and avarice first made them feeble. The rewards of the state were conferred on amusing, and not on useful, members of society. Their riches and opulence invited the invaders, who, though at first repulsed, returned again, conquered by perseverance, and at last swept the defendants into undistinguished destruction.’ ”

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## CHAPTER VI.

### PERSONAL TRAITS.

THE foregoing extracts will sufficiently show what were the chief characteristics of Goldsmith's writing at this time—the grace and ease of style, a gentle and sometimes pathetic thoughtfulness, and, above all, when he speaks in the first person, a delightful vein of humorous self-disclosure. Moreover, these qualities, if they were not immediately profitable to the booksellers, were beginning to gain for him the recognition of some of the well-known men of the day. Percy, afterwards Bishop of Dromore, had made his way to the miserable garret of the poor author. Smollett, whose novels Goldsmith preferred to his History, was anxious to secure his services as a contributor to the forthcoming *British Magazine*. Burke had spoken of the pleasure given him by Goldsmith's review of the *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. But, to crown all, the great Cham himself sought out this obscure author, who had on several occasions spoken with reverence and admiration of his works ; and so began what is perhaps the most interesting literary friendship on record. At what precise date Johnson first made Goldsmith's acquaintance is not known ; Mr. Forster is right in assuming that they had met before the supper in Wine-Office Court, at which Mr. Percy was present. It is a thousand pities that Boswell had not by this time made his appearance in London. Johnson, Goldsmith, and all the rest of them are only ghosts until the pertinacious young laird of Auchinleck comes on the scene to give them colour, and life, and form. It is odd enough that the very first remarks of Goldsmith's which Boswell jotted down in his note-book should refer to Johnson's systematic kindness towards the poor and wretched. “ He had increased my admiration of the goodness of Johnson's heart by incidental remarks in the course of conversation, such as, when I mentioned Mr. Levett, whom he entertained under his roof, ‘He is poor and honest, which is recommendation enough to Johnson ;’ and when I wondered that he was very kind to a man of whom I had heard a very bad character, ‘He is now become miserable, and that insures the protection of Johnson.’ ”

For the rest, Boswell was not well-disposed towards Goldsmith, whom he regarded with a jealousy equal to his admiration of Johnson; but it is probable that his description of the personal appearance of the awkward and ungainly Irishman is in the main correct. And here also it may be said that Boswell's love of truth and accuracy compelled him to make this admission: "It has been generally circulated and believed that he (Goldsmith) was a mere fool in conversation; but, in truth, this has been greatly exaggerated." On this exaggeration—seeing that the contributor to the *British Magazine* and the *Public Ledger* was now becoming better known among his fellow-authors—a word or two may fitly be said here. It pleased Goldsmith's contemporaries, who were not all of them celebrated for their ready wit, to regard him as a hopeless and incurable fool, who by some strange chance could produce literature, the merits of which he could not himself understand. To Horace Walpole we owe the phrase which describes Goldsmith as an "inspired idiot." Innumerable stories are told of Goldsmith's blunders; of his forced attempts to shine in conversation; of poor Poll talking nonsense, when all the world was wondering at the beauty of his writing. In one case we are told he was content to admit, when dictated to, that this, and not that, was what he really had meant in a particular phrase. Now there can be no question that Goldsmith, conscious of his pitted face, his broue, and his ungainly figure, was exceedingly nervous and sensitive in society, and was anxious, as such people mostly are, to cover his shyness by an appearance of ease, if not even of swagger; and there can be as little question that he occasionally did and said very awkward and blundering things. But our Japanese friend whom we mentioned in our opening pages, looking through the record that is preserved to us of those blunders which are supposed to be most conclusive as to this aspect of Goldsmith's character, would certainly stare. "Good heavens," he would cry, "did men ever live who were so thick-headed as not to see the humour of this or that 'blunder'; or were they so beset with the notion that Goldsmith was only a fool, that they must needs be blind?" Take one well-known instance. He goes to France with Mrs. Horneck and her two daughters, the latter very handsome young ladies. At Lille the two girls and Goldsmith are standing at the window of the hotel, overlooking the square in which are some soldiers; and naturally the beautiful young Englishwomen attract some attention. Thereupon Goldsmith turns indignantly away, remarking that elsewhere he also has his admirers. Now what surgical instrument was needed to get this harmless little joke into any sane person's head? Boswell may perhaps be pardoned for pretending to take the incident *au sérieux*; for, as has just been said, in his profound adoration of Johnson, he was devoured by jealousy of Goldsmith; but that any other mortal should have failed to see what was meant by this little bit of humor-

ous flattery is almost incredible. No wonder that one of the sisters, afterwards referring to this "playful jest," should have expressed her astonishment at finding it put down as a proof of Goldsmith's envious disposition. But even after that disclaimer, we find Mr. Croker, as quoted by Mr. Forster, solemnly doubting "whether the vexation so seriously exhibited by Goldsmith was real or assumed !"

Of course this is an extreme case ; but there are others very similar. "He affected," says Hawkins, "Johnson's style and manner of conversation, and when he had uttered, as he often would, a laboured sentence, so tumid as to be scarce intelligible, would ask if that was not truly Johnsonian ?" Is it not truly dismal to find such an utterance coming from a presumably reasonable human being ? It is not to be wondered at that Goldsmith grew shy—and in some cases had to ward off the acquaintance of certain of his neighbours as being too intrusive—if he ran the risk of having his odd and grave humours so densely mistranslated. The fact is this, that Goldsmith was possessed of a very subtle quality of humour, which is at all times rare, but which is perhaps more frequently to be found in Irishmen than among other folks. It consists in the satire of the pretence and pomposities of others by means of a sort of exaggerated and playful self-depreciation. It is a most delicate and most delightful form of humour ; but it is very apt to be misconstrued by the dull. Who can doubt that Goldsmith was good-naturedly laughing at himself, his own plain face, his vanity, and his blunders, when he professed to be jealous of the admiration excited by the Miss Hornecks ; when he gravely drew attention to the splendid colours of his coat ; or when he no less gravely informed a company of his friends that he had heard a very good story, but would not repeat it, because they would be sure to miss the point of it ?

This vein of playful and sarcastic self-depreciation is continually cropping up in his essay-writing, as, for example, in the passage already quoted from No. IV. of the *Bee* : "I conclude that what my reputation wants in extent is made up by its solidity. *Minus jurat gloria lula quam magna.* I have great satisfaction in considering the delicacy and discernment of those readers I have, and in ascribing my want of popularity to the ignorance or inattention of those I have not." But here, no doubt, he remembers that he is addressing the world at large, which contains many foolish persons ; and so, that the delicate raillery may not be mistaken, he immediately adds, "All the world may forsake an author, but vanity will never forsake him." That he expected a quicker apprehension on the part of his intimates and acquaintances, and that he was frequently disappointed, seems pretty clear from those very stories of his "blunders." We may reasonably suspect, at all events, that Goldsmith was not quite so much of a fool as he looked ; and it is far from improbable that when the ungainly Irishman was called in to make sport for the Philistines—and there were a good many Philistines in those days, if all stories be true—and



when they imagined they had put him out of countenance, he was really standing aghast, and wondering how it could have pleased Providence to create such helpless stupidity.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CITIZEN OF THE WORLD.—BEAU NASH.

MEANWHILE, to return to his literary work, the *Citizen of the World* had grown out of his contributions to the *Public Ledger*, a daily newspaper started by Mr. Newbery, another bookseller in St. Paul's Churchyard. Goldsmith was engaged to write for this paper two letters a week at a guinea a-piece; and these letters were, after a short time (1760), written in the character of a Chinese who had come to study European civilization. It may be noted that Goldsmith had in the *Monthly Review*, in mentioning Voltaire's memoirs of French writers, quoted a passage about Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* as follows: "It is written in imitation of the *Siamese Letters* of Du Freny and of the *Turkish Spy*; but it is an imitation which shows what the originals should have been. The success their works met with was, for the most part, owing to the foreign air of their performances; the success of the *Persian Letters* arose from the delicacy of their satire. That satire which in the mouth of an Asiatic is poignant, would lose all its force when coming from an European." And it must certainly be said that the charm of the strictures of the *Citizen of the World* lies wholly in their delicate satire, and not at all in any foreign air which the author may have tried to lend to these performances. The disguise is very apparent. In those garrulous, vivacious, whimsical, and sometimes serious papers, Lien Chi Altangi, writing to Fum Hoam in Peking, does not so much describe the aspects of European civilization which would naturally surprise a Chinese, as he expresses the dissatisfaction of a European with certain phases of the civilization visible everywhere around him. It is not a Chinaman, but a Fleet-street author by profession, who resents the competition of noble amateurs whose works, otherwise bitter pills enough, are gilded by their titles: "A nobleman has but to take a pen, ink, and paper, write away through three large volumes, and then sign his name to the title-page; though the whole might have been before more disgusting than his own rent-roll, yet signing his name and title gives value to the deed, title being alone equivalent to taste, imagination, and genius. As soon as a piece, therefore, is published, the first questions are: Who is the author? Does he keep a coach? Where lies his estate? What sort of a table does he keep? If he happens to be poor and unquali-

fied for such a scrutiny, he and his works sink into irremediable obscurity, and too late he finds, that having fed upon turtle is a more ready way to fame than having digested Tully. The poor devil against whom fashion has set its face vainly alleges that he has been bred in every part of Europe where knowledge was to be sold ; that he has grown pale in the study of nature and himself. His works may please upon the perusal, but his pretensions to fame are entirely disregarded. He is treated like a fiddler, whose music, though liked, is not much praised, because he lives by it ; while a gentleman performer, though the most wretched scraper alive, throws the audience into raptures. The fiddler, indeed, may in such a case console himself by thinking, that while the other goes off with all the praise, he runs away with all the money. But here the parallel drops ; for while the nobleman triumphs in unmerited applause, the author by profession steals off with—nothing.”

At the same time it must be allowed that the utterance of these strictures through the mouth of a Chinese admits of a certain *naïveté*, which on occasion heightens the sarcasm. Lien Chi accompanies the Man in Black to a theatre to see an English play. Here is part of the performance : “ I was going to second his remarks, when my attention was engrossed by a new object ; a man came in balancing a straw upon his nose, and the audience were clapping their hands in all the rapture of applause. ‘ To what purpose,’ cried I, ‘ does this unmeaning figure make his appearance ? is he a part of the plot ? ’— ‘ Unmeaning do you call him ? ’ replied my friend in black ; ‘ this is one of the most important characters of the whole play ; nothing pleases the people more than seeing a straw balanced : there is a great deal of meaning in a straw : there is something suited to every apprehension in the sight ; and a fellow possessed of talents like these is sure of making his fortune.’ The third act now began with an actor who came to inform us that he was the villain of the play, and intended to show strange things before all was over. He was joined by another who seemed as much disposed for mischief as he ; their intrigues continued through this whole division. ‘ If that be a villain,’ said I, ‘ he must be a very stupid one to tell his secrets without being asked ; such soliloquies of late are never admitted in China.’ The noise of clapping interrupted me once more ; a child six years old was learning to dance on the stage, which gave the ladies and mandarins infinite satisfaction. ‘ I am sorry,’ said I, ‘ to see the pretty creature so early learning so bad a trade ; dancing being, I presume, as contemptible here as in China.’— ‘ Quite the reverse,’ interrupted my companion ; ‘ dancing is a very reputable and genteel employment here ; men have a greater chance for encouragement from the merit of their heels than their heads. One who jumps up and flourishes his toes three times before he comes to the ground may have three hundred a year ; he who flourishes them four times gets four hundred ; but he who ar-

rives at five is inestimable, and may demand what salary he thinks proper. The female dancers, too, are valued for this sort of jumping and crossing ; and it is a cant word amongst them, that she deserves most who shows highest. But the fourth act is begun ; let us be attentive. ”

The Man in Black here mentioned is one of the notable features of this series of papers. The mysterious person whose acquaintance the Chinaman made in Westminster Abbey, and who concealed such a wonderful goodness of heart under a rough and forbidding exterior, is a charming character indeed ; and it is impossible to praise too highly the vein of subtle sarcasm in which he preaches worldly wisdom. But to assume that any part of his history which he disclosed to the Chinaman was a piece of autobiographical writing on the part of Goldsmith, is a very hazardous thing. A writer of fiction must necessarily use such materials as have come within his own experience ; and Goldsmith's experience—or his use of those materials—was extremely limited : witness how often a pet fancy, like his remembrance of *Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night*, is repeated. “ That of these simple elements,” writes Professor Masson, in his *Memoir of Goldsmith*, prefixed to an edition of his works, “ he made so many charming combinations, really differing from each other, and all, though suggested by fact, yet hung so sweetly in an ideal air, proved what an artist he was, and was better than much that is commonly called invention. In short, if there is a sameness of effect in Goldsmith's writings, it is because they consist of poetry and truth, humour and pathos, from his own life, and the supply from such a life as his was not inexhaustible.”

The question of invention is easily disposed of. Any child can invent a world transcending human experience by the simple combination of ideas which are in themselves incongruous—a world in which the horses have each five feet, in which the grass is blue and the sky green, in which seas are balanced on the peaks of mountains. The result is unbelievable and worthless. But the writer of imaginative literature uses his own experiences and the experiences of others, so that his combination of ideas in themselves compatible shall appear so natural and believable that the reader—although these incidents and characters never did actually exist—is as much interested in them as if they had existed. The mischief of it is that the reader sometimes thinks himself very clever, and, recognizing a little bit of the story as having happened to the author, jumps to the conclusion that such and such a passage is necessarily autobiographical. Hence it is that Goldsmith has been hastily identified with the Philosophic Vagabond in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and with the Man in Black in the *Citizen of the World*. That he may have used certain experiences in the one, and that he may perhaps have given in the other a sort of fancy sketch of a person suggested by some trait in his own character, is



possible enough ; but further assertion of likeness is impossible. That the Man in Black had one of Goldsmith's little weaknesses is obvious enough : we find him just a trifle too conscious of his own kindliness and generosity. The Vicar of Wakefield himself is not without a spice of this amiable vanity. As for Goldsmith, every one must remember his reply to Griffiths' accusation : " No, sir, had I been a sharper, *had I been possessed of less good nature and native generosity*, I might surely now have been in better circumstances."

The Man in Black, in any case, is a delightful character. We detect the warm and generous nature even in his pretence of having acquired worldly wisdom : " I now therefore pursued a course of uninterrupted frugality, seldom wanted a dinner, and was consequently invited to twenty. I soon began to get the character of a saving hunk that had money, and insensibly grew into esteem. Neighbours have asked my advice in the disposal of their daughters ; and I have always taken care not to give any. I have contracted a friendship with an alderman, only by observing, that if we take a farthing from a thousand pounds, it will be a thousand pounds no longer. I have been invited to a pawnbroker's table, by pretending to hate gravy ; and am now actually upon treaty of marriage with a rich widow, for only having observed that the bread was rising. If ever I am asked a question, whether I know it or not, instead of answering, I only smile and look wise. If a charity is proposed, I go about with the hat, but put nothing in myself. If a wretch solicits my pity, I observe that the world is filled with impostors, and take a certain method of not being deceived by never relieving. In short, I now find the truest way of finding esteem, even from the indigent, is to give away nothing, and thus have much in our power to give." This is a very clever piece of writing, whether it is in strict accordance with the character of the Man in Black or not. But there is in these *Public Ledger* papers another sketch of character, which is not only consistent in itself, and in every way admirable, but is of still further interest to us when we remember that at this time the various personages in the *Vicar of Wakefield* were no doubt gradually assuming definite form in Goldsmith's mind. It is in the figure of Mr. Tibbs, introduced apparently at haphazard, but at once taking possession of us by its quaint relief, that we find Goldsmith showing a firmer hand in character-drawing. With a few happy dramatic touches Mr. Tibbs starts into life ; he speaks for himself ; he becomes one of the people whom we know. And yet, with this concise and sharp portraiture of a human being, look at the graceful, almost garrulous, ease of the style :

" Our pursuer soon came up and joined us with all the familiarity of an old acquaintance. ' My dear Drybone,' cries he, shaking my friend's hand, ' where have you been hiding this half a century ? Positively I had fancied you were gone to cultivate matrimony and your estate in the country.' During the reply I had an op-

portunity of surveying the appearance of our new companion : his hat was pinched up with peculiar smartness ; his looks were pale, thin, and sharp ; round his neck he wore a broad black riband, and in his bosom a buckle studded with glass ; his coat was trimmed with tarnished twist ; he wore by his side a sword with a black hilt ; and his stockings of silk, though newly washed, were grown yellow by long service. I was so much engaged with the peculiarity of his dress, that I attended only to the latter part of my friend's reply, in which he complimented Mr. Tibbs on the taste of his clothes and the bloom in his countenance. 'Pshaw, pshaw, Will,' cried the figure, 'no more of that, if you love me : you know I hate flattery—on my soul I do ; and yet, to be sure, an intimacy with the great will improve one's appearance, and a course of venison will fatten ; and yet, faith, I despise the great as much as you do : but there are a great many damn'd honest fellows among them, and we must not quarrel with one half because the other wants weeding. If they were all such as my Lord Mudler, one of the most good-natured creatures that ever squeezed a lemon, I should myself be among the number of their admirers. I was yesterday to dine at the Duchess of Piccadilly's. My lord was there. "Ned," says he to me, "Ned," says he, "I'll hold gold to silver, I can tell you where you were poaching last night." "Poaching, my lord ?" says I ; "faith, you have missed already ; for I stayed at home and let the girls poach for me. That's my way : I take a fine woman as some animals do their prey—stand still, and, swoop, they fall into my mouth." "Ah, Tibbs, thou art a happy fellow," cried my companion, with looks of infinite pity ; 'I hope your fortune is as much improved as your understanding, in such company ?' 'Improved !' replied the other ; 'you shall know—but let it go no farther—a great secret—five hundred a year to begin with—my lord's word of honour for it. His lordship took me down in his own chariot yesterday, and we had a *tête-à-tête* dinner in the country, where we talked of nothing else.' "I fancy you forget, sir," cried I ; 'you told us but this moment of your dining yesterday in town.' "Did I say so ?" replied he, coolly ; 'to be sure, if I said so, it was so. Dined in town ! egad, now I do remember, I did dine in town ; but I dined in the country too ; for you must know, my boys, I ate two dinners. By the bye, I am grown as nice as the devil in my eating. I'll tell you a pleasant affair about that : we were a select party of us to dine at Lady Grogam's—an affected piece, but let it go no farther—a secret. Well, there happened to be no assafoetida in the sauce to a turkey, upon which, says I, I'll hold a thousand guineas, and say done, first, that—But, dear Dry-bone, you are an honest creature ; lend me half-a-crown for a minute or two, or so, just till — ; but hearkee, ask me for it the next time we meet, or it may be twenty to one but I forget to pay you.'"

Returning from these performances to the author of them, we find him a busy man of letters, becoming more and more in request among the booksellers, and obtaining recognition among his fellow-writers. He had moved into better lodgings in Wine-Office Court (1760-2) ; and it was here that he entertained at supper, as has already been mentioned, no less distinguished guests than Bishop, then Mr., Percy, and Dr., then Mr. Johnson. Every one has heard of the surprise of Percy, on calling for Johnson, to find the great Cham dressed with quite unusual smartness. On asking the cause of this "singular transformation," Johnson replied, "Why, sir, I hear that Goldsmith, who is a very great sloven, justifies his disregard of cleanliness and decency by quoting my practice ; and I am desirous this night to show him a better example." That Goldsmith profited by this example—though the tailors did not—is clear enough. At times, indeed, he blossomed out into the splendours of a dandy ; and laughed at himself for doing so. But whether he was in gorgeous or mean attire, he remained the same sort of happy-go-lucky creature ;

working hard by fits and starts; continually getting money in advance from the booksellers; enjoying the present hour; and apparently happy enough when not pressed by debt. That he should have been thus pressed was no necessity of the case; at all events we need not on this score begin now to abuse the booksellers or the public of that day. We may dismiss once for all the oft repeated charges of ingratitude and neglect.

When Goldsmith was writing those letters in the *Public Ledger*—with “pleasure and instruction for others,” Mr. Forster says, “though at the cost of suffering to himself”—he was receiving for them alone what would be equivalent in our day to £200 a year. No man can affirm that £200 a year is not amply sufficient for all the material wants of life. Of course there are fine things in the world that that amount of annual wage cannot purchase. It is a fine thing to sit on the deck of a yacht on a summer’s day, and watch the far islands shining over the blue; it is a fine thing to drive four-in-hand to Ascot—if you can do it; it is a fine thing to cower breathless behind a rock and find a splendid stag coming slowly within sure range. But these things are not necessary to human happiness: it is possible to do without them and yet not “suffer.” Even if Goldsmith had given half of his substance away to the poor, there was enough left to cover all the necessary wants of a human being; and if he chose so to order his affairs as to incur the suffering of debt, why that was his own business, about which nothing further needs be said. It is to be suspected, indeed, that he did not care to practise those excellent maxims of prudence and frugality which he frequently preached; but the world is not much concerned about that now. If Goldsmith had received ten times as much money as the booksellers gave him, he would still have died in debt. And it is just possible that we may exaggerate Goldsmith’s sensitiveness on this score. He had had a life-long familiarity with duns and borrowing; and seemed very contented when the exigency of the hour was tidied over. An angry landlady is unpleasant, and an arrest is awkward; but in comes an opportune guinea, and the bottle of Madeira is opened forthwith.

In these rooms in Wine-Office Court, and at the suggestion or entreaty of Newbery, Goldsmith produced a good deal of miscellaneous writing—pamphlets, tracts, compilations, and what not—of a more or less marketable kind. It can only be surmised that by this time he may have formed some idea of producing a book not solely meant for the market, and that the characters in the *Vicar of Wakefield* were already engaging his attention; but the surmise becomes probable enough when we remember that his project of writing the *Traveller*, which was not published till 1764, had been formed as far back as 1755, while he was wandering aimlessly about Europe, and that a sketch of the poem was actually forwarded by him then to his



brother Henry in Ireland. But in the meantime this hack-work, and the habits of life connected with it, began to tell on Goldsmith's health ; and so, for a time, he left London (1762), and went to Tunbridge, and then to Bath. It is scarcely possible that his modest fame had preceded him to the latter place of fashion ; but it may be that the distinguished folk of the town received this friend of the great Dr. Johnson with some small measure of distinction ; for we find that his next published work, *The Life of Richard Nash, Esq.*, is respectfully dedicated to the Right Worshipful the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen, and Common Council of the City of Bath. The Life of the recently deceased Master of Ceremonies was published anonymously (1762) ; but it was generally understood to be Goldsmith's ; and indeed the secret of the authorship is revealed in every successive line. Among the minor writings of Goldsmith there is none more delightful than this : the mock heroic gravity, the half-familiar contemptuous good-nature with which he composes this Funeral March of a Marionette, are extremely whimsical and amusing. And then what an admirable picture we get of fashionable English society in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Bath and Nash were alike in the heyday of their glory—the fine ladies with their snuff-boxes, and their passion for play, and their extremely effective language when they got angry ; young bucks come to flourish away their money, and gain by their losses the sympathy of the fair ; sharpers on the lookout for guineas, and adventurers on the lookout for weak minded heiresses ; duchesses writing letters in the most doubtful English, and chairmen swearing at any one who dared to walk home on foot at night.

No doubt the Life of Beau Nash was a bookseller's book ; and it was made as attractive as possible by the recapitulation of all sorts of romantic stories about Miss S——n, and Mr. C——e, and Captain K——g ; but throughout we find the historian very much inclined to laugh at his hero, and only refraining now and again in order to record in serious language traits indicative of the real goodness of disposition of that fop and gambler. And the fine ladies and gentlemen, who lived in that atmosphere of scandal, and intrigue, and gambling, are also from time to time treated to a little decorous and respectful raillery. Who does not remember the famous laws of polite breeding written out by Mr. Nash—Goldsmith hints that neither Mr. Nash nor his fair correspondent at Blenheim, the Duchess of Marlborough, excelled in English composition—for the guidance of the ladies and gentlemen who were under the sway of the King of Bath ? “ But were we to give laws to a nursery, we should make them childish laws,” Goldsmith writes gravely. “ His statutes, though stupid, were addressed to fine gentlemen and ladies, and were probably received with sympathetic approbation. It is certain they were in general religiously observed by his subjects, and executed by him with

impartiality ; neither rank nor fortune shielded the refractory from his resentment." Nash, however, was not content with prose in enforcing good manners. Having waged deadly war against the custom of wearing boots, and having found his ordinary armory of no avail against the obduracy of the country squires, he assailed them in the impassioned language of poetry, and produced the following "Invitation to the Assembly," which, as Goldsmith remarks, was highly relished by the nobility at Bath on account of its keenness, severity, and particularly its good rhymes.

"Come, one and all, to Hoyden Hall,  
For there's the assembly this night ;  
None but rude fools  
Mind manners and rules ;  
We Hoydens do decency slight.  
Come, trollops and slatterns,  
Cocked hats and white aprons,  
This best our modesty suits ;  
For why should not we  
In dress be as free  
As Hogs-Norton Squires in boots ?"

The sarcasm was too much for the squires, who yielded in a body ; and when any stranger through inadvertence presented himself in the assembly-rooms in boots, Nash was so completely master of the situation that he would politely step up to the intruder and suggest that he had forgotten his horse.

Goldsmith does not magnify the intellectual capacity of his hero ; but he gives him credit for a sort of rude wit that was sometimes effective enough. His physician, for example, having called on him to see whether he had followed a prescription that had been sent him the previous day, was greeted in this fashion : "Followed your prescription ? No. Egad, if I had, I should have broken my neck, for I flung it out of the two pair of stairs window." For the rest, this diverting biography contains some excellent warnings against the vice of gambling ; with a particular account of the manner in which the Government of the day tried by statute after statute to suppress the tables at Tunbridge and Bath, thereby only driving the sharpers to new subterfuges. That the Beau was in alliance with sharpers, or, at least, that he was a sleeping partner in the firm, his biographer admits ; but it is urged on his behalf that he was the most generous of winners, and again and again interfered to prevent the ruin of some gambler by whose folly he would himself have profited. His constant charity was well known ; the money so lightly come by was at the disposal of any one who could prefer a piteous tale. Moreover he made no scruple about exacting from others that charity which they could well afford. One may easily guess who was the duchess mentioned in the following story of Goldsmith's narration ;

"The sums he gave and collected for the Hospital were great, and his manner of doing it was no less admirable. I am told that he was once collecting money in Wiltshire's room for that purpose, when a lady entered, who is more remarkable for her wit than her charity, and not being able to pass him by unobserved, she gave him a pat with her fan, and said, 'You must put down a trifle for me, Nash, for I have no money in my pocket.' 'Yes, madam,' says he, 'that I will with pleasure, if your grace will tell me when to stop;' then taking an handful of guineas out of his pocket, he began to tell them into his white hat—'One, two, three, four, five——', 'Hold, hold!' says the duchess, 'consider what you are about.' 'Consider your rank and fortune, madam,' says Nash, and continues telling—'six, seven, eight, nine, ten.' Here the duchess called again, and seemed angry. 'Pray compose yourself, madam,' cried Nash, 'and don't interrupt the work of charity—eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.' Here the duchess stormed, and caught hold of his hand. 'Peace, madam,' says Nash, 'you shall have your name written in letters of gold, madam, and upon the front of the building, madam—sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty.' 'I won't pay a farthing more,' says the duchess. 'Charity hides a multitude of sins,' replies Nash—'twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five.' 'Nash,' says she, 'I protest you frighten me out of my wits. I—d, I shall die!' 'Madam, you will never die with doing good; and if you do, it will be the better for you,' answered Nash, and was about to proceed; but perceiving her grace had lost all patience, a parley ensued, when he, after much altercation, agreed to stop his hand and compound with her grace for thirty guineas. The duchess, however, seemed displeased the whole evening, and when he came to the table where she was playing, bid him, 'Stand farther, an ugly devil, for she bated the sight of him.' But her grace afterwards having a run of good luck called Nash to her. 'Come,' says she, 'I will be friends with you, though you are a fool; and to let you see I am not angry, there is ten guineas more for your charity. But this I insist on, that neither my name nor the sum shall be mentioned.'"

At the ripe age of eighty-seven the "beau of three generations" breathed his last (1761); and, though he had fallen into poor ways, there were those alive who remembered his former greatness, and who chronicled it in a series of epitaphs and poetical lamentations. "One thing is common almost with all of them," says Goldsmith, "and that is that Venus, Cupid, and the Graces are commanded to weep, and that Bath shall never find such another." These effusions are forgotten now; and so would Beau Nash be also but for this biography, which, no doubt meant merely for the book-market of the day, lives and is of permanent value by reason of the charm of its style, its pervading humour, and the vivacity of its descriptions of the fashionable follies of the eighteenth century. *Nullum fere genus scribendi non tetigit. Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.* Who but Goldsmith could have written so delightful a book about such a poor creature as Beau Nash?



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE ARREST.

It was no doubt owing to Newbery that Goldsmith, after his return to London, was induced to abandon, temporarily or altogether, his apartments in Wine-Office Court, and take lodgings in the house of a Mrs. Fleming, who lived somewhere or other in Islington. Newbery had rooms in Canonbury House, a curious old building that still exists; and it may have occurred to the publisher that Goldsmith, in this suburban district, would not only be nearer him for consultation and so forth, but also might pay more attention to his duties than when he was among the temptations of Fleet Street. Goldsmith was working industriously in the service of Newbery at this time (1763-4): in fact, so completely was the bookseller in possession of the hack, that Goldsmith's board and lodging in Mrs. Fleming's house, arranged for at £50 a year, was paid by Newbery himself. Writing prefaces, revising new editions, contributing reviews—this was the sort of work he undertook, with more or less content, as the equivalent of the modest sums Mr. Newbery disbursed for him or handed over as pocket-money. In the midst of all this drudgery he was now secretly engaged on work that aimed at something higher than mere payment of bed and board. The smooth lines of the *Traveller* were receiving further polish; the gentle-natured *Vicar* was writing his simple, quaint, tender story. And no doubt Goldsmith was spurred to try something better than hack-work by the associations that he was now forming, chiefly under the wise and benevolent friendship of Johnson.

Anxious always to be thought well of, he was now beginning to meet people whose approval was worthy of being sought. He had been introduced to Reynolds. He had become the friend of Hogarth. He had even made the acquaintance of Mr. Boswell, from Scotland. Moreover, he had been invited to become one of the original members of the famous Club of which so much has been written; his fellow-members being Reynolds, Johnson, Burke, Hawkins, Beaucherk, Bennet Langton, and Dr. Nugent. It is almost certain that it was at Johnson's instigation that he had been admitted into this choice fellowship. Long before either the *Traveller* or the *Vicar* had been heard of, Johnson had perceived the literary genius that obscurely burned in the uncouth figure of this Irishman, and was anxious to impress on others Goldsmith's claims to respect and consideration. In the minute record kept by Boswell of his first evening with Johnson at the Mitre Tavern, we find Johnson saying, "Dr. Goldsmith is one of the first men we now have as an author, and he is a very worthy man too. He has been loose in his principles, but he is coming right,"

Johnson took walks with Goldsmith ; did him the honour of disputing with him on all occasions ; bought a copy of the *Life of Nash* when it appeared—an unusual compliment for one author to pay another, in their day or in ours ; allowed him to call on Miss Williams, the blind old lady in Bolt Court ; and generally was his friend, counsellor, and champion. Accordingly, when Mr. Boswell entertained the great Cham to supper at the Mitre—a sudden quarrel with his landlord having made it impossible for him to order the banquet at his own house—he was careful to have Dr. Goldsmith of the company. His guests that evening were Johnson, Goldsmith, Davies (the actor and bookseller who had conferred on Boswell the invaluable favour of an introduction to Johnson), Mr. Eccles, and the Rev. Mr. Ogilvie, a Scotch poet who deserves our gratitude because it was his inopportune patriotism that provoked, on this very evening, the memorable epigram about the high-road leading to England. “Goldsmith,” says Boswell, who had not got over his envy at Goldsmith’s being allowed to visit the blind old pensioner in Bolt Court, “as usual, endeavoured with too much eagerness to *shine*, and disputed very warmly with Johnson against the well-known maxim of the British constitution, ‘The king can do no wrong.’” It was a dispute not so much about facts as about phraseology ; and, indeed, there seems to be no great warmth in the expressions used on either side. Goldsmith affirmed that “what was morally false could not be politically true ;” and that, in short, the king could by the misuse of his regal power do wrong. Johnson replied, that, in such a case, the immediate agents of the king were the persons to be tried and punished for the offence. “The king, though he should command, cannot force a judge to condemn a man unjustly ; therefore it is the judge whom we prosecute and punish.” But when he stated that the king “is above every thing, and there is no power by which he can be tried,” he was surely forgetting an important chapter in English history. “What did Cromwell do for his country ?” he himself asked, during his subsequent visit to Scotland, of old Auchinleck, Boswell’s father. “God, Doctor,” replied the vile Whig, “*he garred kings ken they have a lith in their necks.*”

For some time after this evening Goldsmith drops out of Boswell’s famous memoir ; perhaps the compiler was not anxious to give him too much prominence. They had not liked each other from the outset. Boswell, vexed by the greater intimacy of Goldsmith with Johnson, called him a blunderer, a feather-brained person, and described his appearance in no flattering terms. Goldsmith, on the other hand, on being asked who was this Scotch cur that followed Johnson’s heels, answered, “He is not a cur ; you are too severe—he is only a bur. Tom Davies flung him at Johnson in sport, and he has the faculty of sticking.” Boswell would probably have been more tolerant of Goldsmith as a rival, if he could have known that on a future day he was to have Johnson all to himself—to carry him to remote wilds

and exhibit him as a portentous literary phenomenon to Highland lairds. It is true that Johnson, at an early period of his acquaintance with Boswell, did talk vaguely about a trip to the Hebrides ; but the young Scotch idolator thought it was all too good to be true. The mention of Sir James Macdonald, says Boswell, "led us to talk of the Western Islands of Scotland, to visit which he expressed a wish that then appeared to me a very romantic fancy, which I little thought would be afterwards realized. He told me that his father had put Martin's account of those islands into his hands when he was very young, and that he was highly pleased with it ; that he was particularly struck with the St. Kilda man's notion that the High Church of Glasgow had been hollowed out of a rock ; a circumstance to which old Mr. Johnson had directed his attention." Unfortunately Goldsmith not only disappears from the pages of Boswell's biography at this time, but also in great measure from the ken of his companions. He was deeply in debt ; no doubt the fine clothes he had been ordering from Mr. Filby in order that he might "shine" among those notable persons, had something to do with it ; he had tried the patience of the booksellers ; and he had been devoting a good deal of time to work not intended to elicit immediate payment. The most patient endeavours to trace out his changes of lodgings, and the fugitive writings that kept him in daily bread, have not been very successful. It is to be presumed that Goldsmith had occasionally to go into hiding to escape from his creditors, and so was missed from his familiar haunts. We only reach daylight again, to find Goldsmith being under threat of arrest from his landlady ; and for the particulars of this famous affair it is necessary to return to Boswell.

Boswell was not in London at that time ; but his account was taken down subsequently from Johnson's narration ; and his accuracy in other matters, his extraordinary memory, and scrupulous care, leave no doubt in the mind that his version of the story is to be preferred to those of Mrs. Piozzi and Sir John Hawkins. We may take it that these are Johnson's own words : "I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and, as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired him to be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merit ; told the landlady I should soon return ; and, having gone to a bookseller, sold it for £60. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill."



We do not know who this landlady was—it cannot now be made out whether the incident occurred at Islington, or in the rooms that Goldsmith partially occupied in the Temple ; but even if Mrs. Fleming be the landlady in question, she was deserving neither of Goldsmith's rating nor of the reprimands that have been bestowed upon her by later writers. Mrs. Fleming had been exceedingly kind to Goldsmith. Again and again in her bills we find items significantly marked £0 0s. 0d. And if her accounts with her lodger did get hopelessly into arrear ; and if she was annoyed by seeing him go out in fine clothes to sup at the Mitre ; and if, at length, her patience gave way, and she determined to have her rights in one way or another, she was no worse than landladies—who are only human beings, and not divinely appointed protectresses of genius—ordinarily are. Mrs. Piozzi says that when Johnson came back with the money Goldsmith “called the woman of the house directly to partake of punch, and pass their time in merriment.” This would be a dramatic touch ; but after Johnson's quietly corking the bottle of Madeira, it is more likely that no such thing occurred ; especially as Boswell quotes the statement as an “extreme inaccuracy.”

The novel which Johnson had taken away and sold to Francis Newbury, a nephew of the elder bookseller, was, as every one knows, the *Vicar of Wakefield*. That Goldsmith, amidst all his pecuniary distress, should have retained this piece in his desk, instead of pawning or promising it to one of his bookselling patrons, points to but one conclusion—that he was building high hopes on it, and was determined to make it as good as lay within his power. Goldsmith put an anxious finish into all his better work ; perhaps that is the secret of the graceful ease that is now apparent in every line. Any young writer who may imagine that the power of clear and concise literary expression comes by nature, cannot do better than study, in Mr. Cunningham's big collection of Goldsmith's writings, the continual and minute alterations which the author considered necessary even after the first edition—sometimes when the second and third editions—had been published. Many of these, especially in the poetical works, were merely improvements in sound as suggested by a singularly sensitive ear, as when he altered the line

“Amidst the ruin, heedless of the dead,”

which had appeared in the first three editions of the *Traveller*, into

“There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,”

which appeared in the fourth. But the majority of the omissions and corrections were prompted by a careful taste, that abhorred everything redundant or slovenly. It has been suggested that when John-

son carried off the *Vicar of Wakefield* to Francis Newbery, the manuscript was not quite finished, but had to be completed afterwards. There was at least plenty of time for that. Newbery does not appear to have imagined that he had obtained a prize in the lottery of literature. He paid the £60 for it—clearly on the assurance of the great father of learning of the day, that there was merit in the little story—somewhere about the end of 1764; but the tale was not issued to the public until March, 1766. “And, sir,” remarked Johnson to Boswell, with regard to the sixty pounds, “a sufficient price, too, when it was sold; for then the fame of Goldsmith had not been elevated, as it afterwards was, by his *Traveller*; and the bookseller had such faint hopes of profit by his bargain, that he kept the manuscript by him a long time, and did not publish it till after the *Traveller* had appeared. Then, to be sure, it was accidentally worth more money.”

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE TRAVELLER.

THIS poem of the *Traveller*, the fruit of much secret labour and the consummation of the hopes of many years, was lying completed in Goldsmith's desk when the incident of the arrest occurred; and the elder Newbery had undertaken to publish it. Then, as at other times, Johnson lent this wayward child of genius a friendly hand. He read over the proof-sheets for Goldsmith; was so kind as to put in a line here and there where he thought fit; and prepared a notice of the poem for the *Critical Review*. The time for the appearance of this new claimant for poetical honours was propitious. “There was perhaps no point in the century,” says Professor Masson, “when the British Muse, such as she had come to be, was doing less, or had so nearly ceased to do any thing, or to have any good opinion of herself, as precisely about the year 1764. Young was dying; Gray was reclusive and indolent; Johnson had long given over his metrical experiments on any except the most inconsiderable scale; Akenside, Armstrong, Smollet, and others less known, had pretty well revealed the amount of their worth in poetry; and Churchill, after his ferocious blaze of what was really rage and declamation in metre, though conventionally it was called poetry, was prematurely defunct. Into this lull came Goldsmith's short but carefully finished poem.” “There has not been so fine a poem since Pope's time,” remarked Johnson to Boswell, on the very first evening after the return of young Auchinleck to London. It would have been no matter for surprise had Goldsmith dedicated this first work that he published under his own

name to Johnson, who had for so long been his constant friend and adviser ; and such a dedication would have carried weight in certain quarters. But there was a finer touch in Goldsmith's thought of inscribing the book to his brother Henry ; and no doubt the public were surprised and pleased to find a poor devil of an author dedicating a work to an Irish parson with £40 a year, from whom he could not well expect any return. It will be remembered that it was to this brother Henry that Goldsmith, ten years before, had sent the first sketch of the poem ; and now the wanderer,

"Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,"

declares how his heart untravelled

"Still to my brother turns, with ceaseless pain,  
And drags at each remove a lengthening chain."

The very first line of the poem strikes a key-note—there is in it a pathetic thrill of distance, and regret, and longing ; and it has the soft musical sound that pervades the whole composition. It is exceedingly interesting to note, as has already been mentioned, how Goldsmith altered and altered these lines until he had got them full of gentle vowel sounds. Where, indeed, in the English language could one find more graceful melody than this ?—

"The naked negro, panting at the line,  
Boasts of his golden sands and palmy wine,  
Basks in the glare, or stems the tepid wave,  
And thanks his gods for all the good they gave."

It has been observed also that Goldsmith was the first to introduce into English poetry sonorous American—or rather Indian—names, as when he writes in this poem,

"Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps around,  
And Niagara stuns with thundering sound ;"

and if it be charged against him that he ought to have known the proper accentuation of Niagara, it may be mentioned as a set-off that Sir Walter Scott, in dealing with his own country, mis-accentuated "Glenaládale," to say nothing of his having made of Roseneath an island. Another characteristic of the *Traveller* is the extraordinary choiceness and conciseness of the diction, which, instead of suggesting pedantry or affectation, betrays, on the contrary, nothing but a delightful ease and grace.

The English people are very fond of good English ; and thus it is that couplets from the *Traveller* and the *Deserted Village* have come into the common stock of our language, and that sometimes not



so much on account of the ideas they convey, as through their singular precision of epithet and musical sound. It is enough to make the angels weep to find such a couplet as this,

“Cheerful at morn, he wakes from short repose,  
Breasts the keen air, and carols as he goes,”

murdered in several editions of Goldsmith's works by the substitution of the commonplace “breathes” for “breasts”—and that after Johnson had drawn particular attention to the line by quoting it in his Dictionary. Perhaps, indeed, it may be admitted that the literary charm of the *Traveller* is more apparent than the value of any doctrine, however profound or ingenious, which the poem was supposed to inculcate. We forget all about the “particular principle of happiness” possessed by each European state, in listening to the melody of the singer, and in watching the successive and delightful pictures that he calls up before the imagination.

“As in those domes where Cæsars once bore sway,  
Defaced by time, and tottering in decay,  
There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,  
The shelter-seeking peasant builds his shed;  
And, wondering man could want the larger pile,  
Exults, and owns his cottage with a smile.”

Then notice the blaze of patriotic idealism that bursts forth when he comes to talk of England. What sort of England had he been familiar with when he was consorting with the meanest wretches—the poverty-stricken, the sick, and squalid—in those Fleet-street dens? But it is an England of bright streams and spacious lawns of which he writes; and as for the people who inhabit the favoured land—

“Stern o’er each bosom reason holds her state,  
Wit daring aims irregularly great;  
Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,  
I see the lords of human kind pass by.”

“Whenever I write any thing,” Goldsmith had said, with a humorous exaggeration which Boswell, as usual, takes *au sérieux*, “the public *make a point* to know nothing about it.” But we have Johnson's testimony to the fact that the *Traveller* “brought him into high reputation.” No wonder. When the great Cham declares it to be the finest poem published since the time of Pope, we are irresistibly forced to think of the *Essay on Man*. What a contrast there is between that tedious and stilted effort and this clear burst of bird-song! The *Traveller*, however, did not immediately become popular. It was largely talked about, naturally, among Goldsmith's friends; and Johnson would scarcely suffer any criticism of it. At a dinner given long afterwards at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, and fully reported by the

invaluable Boswell, Reynolds remarked, "I was glad to hear Charles Fox say it was one of the finest poems in the English language." "Why were you glad?" said Langton. "You surely had no doubt of this before?" Hereupon Johnson struck in: "No; the merit of the *Traveller* is so well established, that Mr. Fox's praise cannot augment it nor his censure diminish it." And he went on to say—Goldsmith having died and got beyond the reach of all critics and creditors some three or four years before this time—"Goldsmith was a man who, whatever he wrote, did it better than any other man could do. He deserved a place in Westminster Abbey; and every year he lived would have deserved it better."

Presently people began to talk about the new poem. A second edition was issued; a third; a fourth. It is not probable that Goldsmith gained any pecuniary benefit from the growing popularity of the little book; but he had "struck for honest fame," and that was now coming to him. He even made some slight acquaintance with "the great;" and here occurs an incident which is one of many that account for the love that the English people have for Goldsmith. It appears that Hawkins, calling one day on the Earl of Northumberland, found the author of the *Traveller* waiting in the outer room, in response to an invitation. Hawkins, having finished his own business, retired, but lingered about until the interview between Goldsmith and his lordship was over, having some curiosity about the result. Here follows Goldsmith's report to Hawkins: "His lordship told me he had read my poem, and was much delighted with it; that he was going to be Lord-lieutenant of Ireland; and that, hearing that I was a native of that country, he should be glad to do me any kindness." "What did you answer?" says Hawkins, no doubt expecting to hear of some application for pension or post. "Why," said Goldsmith, "I could say nothing but that I had a brother there, a clergyman, that stood in need of help"—and then he explained to Hawkins that he looked to the booksellers for support, and was not inclined to place dependence on the promises of great men. "Thus did this idiot in the affairs of the world," adds Hawkins, with a fatuity that is quite remarkable in its way, "trifle with his fortunes, and put back the hand that was held out to assist him! Other offers of a like kind he either rejected or failed to improve, contenting himself with the patronage of one nobleman, whose mansion afforded him the delights of a splendid table and a retreat for a few days from the metropolis." It is a great pity we have not a description from the same pen of Johnson's insolent ingratitude in flinging the pair of boots downstairs.

## CHAPTER X.

## MISCELLANEOUS WRITING.

BUT one pecuniary result of this growing fame was a joint offer on the part of Griffin and Newbery of £20 for a selection from his printed essays; and this selection was forthwith made and published, with a preface written for the occasion. Here at once we can see that Goldsmith takes firmer ground. There is an air of confidence—of gayety, even—in his address to the public; although, as usual, accompanied by a whimsical mock-modesty that is extremely odd and effective. “Whatever right I have to complain of the public,” he says, “they can, as yet, have no just reason to complain of me. If I have written dull Essays, they have hitherto treated them as dull Essays. Thus far we are at least upon par, and until they think fit to make me their humble debtor by praise, I am resolved not to lose a single inch of my self-importance. Instead, therefore, of attempting to establish a credit amongst them, it will perhaps be wiser to apply to some more distant correspondent; and as my drafts are in some danger of being protested at home, it may not be imprudent, upon this occasion, to draw my bills upon Posterity.

“MR. POSTERITY,

“SIR: Nine hundred and ninety-nine years after sight hereof pay the bearer, or order, a thousand pounds' worth of praise, free from all deductions whatsoever, it being a commodity that will then be very serviceable to him, and place it to the account of, etc.”

The bill is not yet due; but there can in the meantime be no harm in discounting it so far as to say that these Essays deserve very decided praise. They deal with all manner of topics, matters of fact, matters of imagination, humorous descriptions, learned criticisms; and then, whenever the entertainer thinks he is becoming dull, he suddenly tells a quaint little story and walks off amidst the laughter he knows he has produced. It is not a very ambitious or sonorous sort of literature; but it was admirably fitted for its aim—the passing of the immediate hour in an agreeable and fairly intellectual way. One can often see, no doubt, that these Essays are occasionally written in a more or less perfunctory fashion, the writer not being moved by much enthusiasm in his subject; but even then a quaint literary grace seldom fails to atone, as when, writing about the English clergy, and complaining that they do not sufficiently in their addresses stoop to mean capacities, he says: “Whatever may become of the higher orders of mankind, who are generally possessed of collateral motives to virtue, the vulgar should be particularly regarded, whose behaviour in civil life is totally hinged upon their hopes and



fears. Those who constitute the basis of the great fabric of society should be particularly regarded; for in policy, as in architecture, ruin is most fatal when it begins from the bottom." There was, indeed, throughout Goldsmith's miscellaneous writing much more common-sense than might have been expected from a writer who was supposed to have none.

As regards his chance criticisms on dramatic and poetical literature, these are generally found to be incisive and just; while sometimes they exhibit a wholesome disregard of mere tradition and authority. "Milton's translation of Horace's Ode to Pyrrha," he says, for example, "is universally known and generally admired, in our opinion much above its merit." If the present writer might for a moment venture into such an arena, he would express the honest belief that that translation is the very worst translation that was ever made of any thing. But there is the happy rendering of *simplex munditiis*, which counts for much.

By this time Goldsmith had also written his charming ballad of *Edwin and Angelina*, which was privately "printed for the amusement of the Countess of Northumberland," and which afterwards appeared in the *Vicar of Wakefield*. It seems clear enough that this quaint and pathetic piece was suggested by an old ballad beginning,

"Gentle herdsman, tell to me,  
Of courtesy I thee pray,  
Unto the towne of Walsingham  
Which is the right and ready way,"

which Percy had shown to Goldsmith, and which, ratched up, subsequently appeared in the *Reliques*. But Goldsmith's ballad is original enough to put aside all the discussion about plagiarism which was afterwards started. In the old fragment the weeping pilgrim receives directions from the herdsman, and goes on her way, and we hear of her no more; in *Edwin and Angelina* the forlorn and despairing maiden suddenly finds herself confronted by the long-lost lover whom she had so cruelly used. This is the dramatic touch that reveals the hand of the artist. And here again it is curious to note the care with which Goldsmith repeatedly revised his writings. The ballad originally ended with these two stanzas:

"Here amidst sylvan bowers we'll rove,  
From lawn to woodland stray;  
Blest as the songsters of the grove,  
And innocent as they.

"To all that want, and all that wail,  
Our pity shall be given,  
And when this life of love shall fail,  
We'll love again in heaven."

But subsequently it must have occurred to the author that the dramatic disclosure once made, and the lovers restored to each other, any lingering over the scene only weakened the force of the climax ; hence these stanzas were judiciously excised. It may be doubted, however, whether the original version of the last couplet,

“ And the last sigh that rends the heart  
Shall break thy Edwin’s too,”

was improved by being altered into

“ The sigh that rends thy constant heart  
Shall break thy Edwin’s too.”

Meanwhile Goldsmith had resorted to hack-work again ; nothing being expected from the *Vicar of Wakefield*, now lying in Newbery’s shop, for that had been paid for, and his expenses were increasing, as became his greater station. In the interval between the publication of the *Traveller* and of the *Vicar*, he moved into better chambers in Garden Court ; he hired a man-servant, he blossomed out in very fine clothes. Indeed, so effective did his first suit seem to be—the purple silk small-clothes, the scarlet roquelaure, the wig, sword, and gold-headed cane—that, as Mr. Forster says, he “amazed his friends with no less than three similar suits, not less expensive, in the next six months.” Part of this display was no doubt owing to a suggestion from Reynolds that Goldsmith, having a medical degree, might just as well add the practice of a physician to his literary work to magnify his social position. Goldsmith, always willing to please his friends, acceded ; but his practice does not appear to have been either extensive or long-continued. It is said that he drew out a prescription for a certain Mrs. Sidebotham which so appalled the apothecary that he refused to make it up ; and that, as the lady sided with the apothecary, he threw up the case and his profession at the same time. If it was money Goldsmith wanted, he was not likely to get it in that way ; he had neither the appearance nor the manner fitted to humour the sick and transform healthy people into valetudinarians. If it was the esteem of his friends and popularity outside that circle, he was soon to acquire enough of both. On the 27th March, 1766, fifteen months after the appearance of the *Traveller*, the *Vicar of Wakefield* was published.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.

THE *Vicar of Wakefield*, considered structurally, follows the lines of the Book of Job. You take a good man, overwhelm him with successive misfortunes, show the pure flame of his soul burning in the midst of the darkness, and then, as the reward of his patience and fortitude and submission, restore him gradually to happiness, with even larger flocks and herds than before. The machinery by which all this is brought about is, in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, the weak part of the story. The plot is full of wild improbabilities ; in fact, the expedients by which all the members of the family are brought together and made happy at the same time, are nothing short of desperate. It is quite clear, too, that the author does not know what to make of the episode of Olivia and her husband ; they are allowed to drop through ; we leave him playing the French horn at a relation's house ; while she, in her father's home, is supposed to be unnoticed, so much are they all taken up with the rejoicings over the double wedding. It is very probable that when Goldsmith began the story he had no very definite plot concocted ; and that it was only when the much-persecuted Vicar had to be restored to happiness, that he found the entanglements surrounding him, and had to make frantic efforts to break through them. But, be that as it may, it is not for the plot that people now read the *Vicar of Wakefield* ; it is not the intricacies of the story that have made it the delight of the world. Surely human nature must be very much the same when this simple description of a quiet English home went straight to the heart of nations in both hemispheres.

And the wonder is that Goldsmith of all men should have produced such a perfect picture of domestic life. What had his own life been but a moving about between garret and tavern, between bachelor's lodgings and clubs ? Where had he seen—unless, indeed, he looked back through the mist of years to the scenes of his childhood—all this gentle government and wise blindness ; all this affection, and consideration, and respect ? There is as much human nature in the character of the Vicar alone as would have furnished any fifty of the novels of that day, or of this. Who has not been charmed by his sly and quaint humour, by his moral dignity and simple vanities, even by the little secrets he reveals to us of his paternal rule. “ ‘Ay,’ returned I, not knowing well what to think of the matter, ‘heaven grant they may be both the better for it this day three months !’ This was one of those observations I usually made to impress my wife with an opinion of my sagacity ; for if the girls succeeded, then it was a pious wish fulfilled ; but if any thing unfortunate ensued, then it might be



looked on as a prophecy." We know how Miss Olivia was answered, when, at her mother's prompting, she set up for being well skilled in controversy :

" 'Why, my dear, what controversy can she have read?' cried I. 'It does not occur to me that I ever put such books into her hands : you certainly overrate her merit'—'Indeed, papa,' replied Olivia, 'she does not ; I have read a great deal of controversy. I have read the disputes between Thwackum and Square ; the controversy between Robinson Crusoe and Friday, the savage ; and I am now employed in reading the controversy in Religious Courtship.'—'Very well,' cried I, 'that's a good girl ; I find you are perfectly qualified for making converts, and so go help your mother to make the gooseberry pie.'"

It is with a great gentleness that the good man reminds his wife and daughters that, after their sudden loss of fortune, it does not become them to wear much finery. "The first Sunday, in particular, their behaviour served to mortify me. I had desired my girls the preceding night to be dressed early the next day ; for I always loved to be at church a good while before the rest of the congregation. They punctually obeyed my directions ; but when we were to assemble in the morning at breakfast, down came my wife and daughters, dressed out in all their former splendour ; their hair plastered up with pomatum, their faces patched to taste, their trains bundled up in a heap behind, and rustling at every motion. I could not help smiling at their vanity, particularly that of my wife, from whom I expected more discretion. In this exigence, therefore, my only resource was to order my son, with an important air, to call our coach. The girls were amazed at the command ; but I repeated it with more solemnity than before. 'Surely, my dear, you jest,' cried my wife ; 'we can walk it perfectly well : we want no coach to carry us now.'—'You mistake, child,' returned I, 'we do want a coach ; for if we walk to church in this trim, the very children in the parish will hoot after us.'—'Indeed,' replied my wife, 'I always imagined that my Charles was fond of seeing his children neat and handsome about him.'—'You may be as neat as you please,' interrupted I, 'and I shall love you the better for it ; but all this is not neatness, but frippery. These ruffings, and pinkings, and patchings will only make us hated by all the wives of our neighbours. No, my children,' continued I, more gravely, 'those gowns may be altered into something of a plainer cut ; for finery is very unbecoming in us, who want the means of decency. I do not know whether such flouncing and shredding is becoming even in the rich, if we consider, upon a moderate calculation, that the nakedness of the indigent world might be clothed from the trimmings of the vain.'

"This remonstrance had the proper effect : they went with great composure, that very instant, to change their dress ; and the next day

I had the satisfaction of finding my daughters, at their own request, employed in cutting up their trains into Sunday waistcoats for Dick and Bill, the two little ones ; and, what was still more satisfactory, the gowns seemed improved by this curtailing." And again when he discovered the two girls making a wash for their faces: "My daughters seemed equally busy with the rest ; and I observed them for a good while cooking something over the fire. I at first supposed they were assisting their mother, but little Dick informed me in a whisper that they were making a wash for the face. Washes of all kinds I had a natural antipathy to ; for I knew that, instead of mending the complexion, they spoil it. I therefore approached my chair by sly degrees to the fire, and grasping the poker, as if it wanted mending, seemingly by accident overturned the whole composition, and it was too late to begin another."

All this is done with such a light, homely touch, that one gets familiarly to know these people without being aware of it. There is no insistence. There is no dragging you along by the collar ; confronting you with certain figures ; and compelling you to look at this and study that. The artist stands by you, and laughs in his quiet way, and you are laughing too, when suddenly you find that human beings have silently come into the void before you ; and you know them for friends ; and even after the vision has faded away, and the beautiful light and colour and glory of romance-land have vanished, you cannot forget them. They have become part of your life ; you will take them to the grave with you.

The story, as every one perceives, has its obvious blemishes. "There are an hundred faults in this Thing," says Goldsmith himself, in the prefixed Advertisement. But more particularly, in the midst of all the impossibilities taking place in and around the jail, when that chameleon-like *deus ex machinâ*, Mr. Jenkinson, winds up the tale in hot haste, Goldsmith pauses to put in a sort of apology. "Nor can I go on without a reflection," he says gravely, "on those accidental meetings, which, though they happen every day, seldom excite our surprise but upon some extraordinary occasion. To what a fortuitous concurrence do we not owe every pleasure and convenience of our lives ! How many seeming accidents must unite before we can be clothed or fed ! The peasant must be disposed to labour, the shower must fall, the wind fill the merchant's sail, or numbers must want the usual supply." This is Mr. Tackeray's "simple rogue" appearing again in adult life. Certainly, if our supply of food and clothing depended on such accidents as happened to make the Vicar's family happy all at once, there would be a good deal of shivering and starvation in the world. Moreover it may be admitted that on occasion Goldsmith's fine instinct deserts him ; and even in describing those domestic relations which are the charm of the novel, he blunders into the unnatural. When Mr. Burchell, for example, leaves the house in

consequence of a quarrel with Mrs. Primrose, the Vicar questions his daughter as to whether she had received from that poor gentleman any testimony of his affection for her. She replies No; but remembers to have heard him remark that he never knew a woman who could find merit in a man that was poor. "Such, my dear," continued the Vicar, "is the common cant of all the unfortunate or idle. But I hope you have been taught to judge properly of such men, and that it would be even madness to expect happiness from one who has been so very bad an economist of his own. Your mother and I have low better prospects for you. The next winter, which you will probably spend in town, will give you opportunities of making a more prudent choice." Now it is not at all likely that a father, however anxious to have his daughter well married and settled, would ask her so delicate a question in open domestic circle, and would then publicly inform her that she was expected to choose a husband on her forthcoming visit to town.

Whatever may be said about any particular incident like this, the atmosphere of the book is true. Goethe, to whom a German translation of the *Vicar* was read by Herder some four years after the publication in England, not only declared it at the time to be one of the best novels ever written, but again and again throughout his life reverted to the charm and delight with which he had made the acquaintance of the English "prose idyll," and took it for granted that it was a real picture of English life. Despite all the machinery of Mr. Jenkinson's schemes, who could doubt it? Again and again there are recurrent strokes of such vividness and naturalness that we yield altogether to the necromancer. Look at this perfect picture—of human emotion and outside nature—put in in a few sentences. The old clergyman, after being in search of his daughter, has found her, and is now—having left her in an inn—returning to his family and his home. "And now my heart caught new sensations of pleasure, the nearer I approached that peaceful mansion. As a bird that had been frightened from its nest, my affections outwent my haste, and hovered round my little fireside with all the rapture of expectation. I called up the many fond things I had to say, and anticipated the welcome I was to receive. I already felt my wife's tender embrace, and smiled at the joy of my little ones. As I walked but slowly, the night waned apace. The labourers of the day were all retired to rest; the lights were out in every cottage; no sounds were heard but of the shrilling cock, and the deep-mouthed watch-dog at hollow distance. I approached my little abode of pleasure, and, before I was within a furlong of the place, our honest mastiff came running to welcome me." "*The deep-mouthed watch-dog at hollow distance*"—what more perfect description of the stillness of night was ever given?

And then there are other qualities in this delightful *Vicar of Wakefield* than merely idyllic tenderness, and pathos, and sly humour.



There is a firm presentation of the crimes and brutalities of the world. The pure light that shines within that domestic circle is all the brighter because of the black outer ring that is here and there indicated rather than described. How could we appreciate all the simplicities of the good man's household, but for the rogueries with which they are brought in contact? And although we laugh at Moses and his gross of green spectacles, and the manner in which the Vicar's wife and daughter are imposed on by Miss Wilhelmina Skeggs and Lady Blarney, with their lords and ladies and their tributes to virtue, there is no laughter demanded of us when we find the simplicity and moral dignity of the Vicar meeting and beating the jeers and taunts of the abandoned wretches in the prison. This is really a remarkable episode. The author was under the obvious temptation to make much comic material out of the situation; while another temptation, towards the goody-goody side, was not far off. But the Vicar undertakes the duty of reclaiming these castaways with a modest patience and earnestness in every way in keeping with his character: while they, on the other hand, are not too easily moved to tears of repentance. His first efforts, it will be remembered, were not too successful. "Their insensibility excited my highest compassion, and blotted my own uneasiness from my mind. It even appeared a duty incumbent upon me to attempt to reclaim them. I resolved, therefore, once more to return, and, in spite of their contempt, to give them my advice, and conquer them by my perseverance. Going, therefore, among them again, I informed Mr. Jenkinson of my design, at which he laughed heartily, but communicated it to the rest. The proposal was received with the greatest good humour, as it promised to afford a new fund of entertainment to persons who had now no other resource for mirth but what could be derived from ridicule or debauchery.

"I therefore read them a portion of the service with a loud, unaffected voice, and found my audience perfectly merry upon the occasion. Lewd whispers, groans of contrition burlesqued, winking and coughing, alternately excited laughter. However, I continued with my natural solemnity to read on, sensible that what I did might mend some, but could itself receive no contamination from any.

"After reading, I entered upon my exhortation, which was rather calculated at first to amuse them than to reprove. I previously observed, that no other motive but their welfare could induce me to this; that I was their fellow-prisoner, and now got nothing by preaching. I was sorry, I said, to hear them so very profane; because they got nothing by it, but might lose a great deal. 'For be assured, my friends,' cried I—'for you are my friends, however the world may disclaim your friendship'—though you swore twelve thousand oaths in a day, it would not put one penny in your purse. Then what signifies calling every moment upon the devil, and courting his friend-

ship, since you find how scurvily he uses you? He has given you nothing here, you find, but a mouthful of oaths and an empty belly; and, by the best accounts I have of him, he will give you nothing that's good hereafter.

"If used ill in our dealings with one man, we naturally go elsewhere. Were it not worth your while, then, just to try how you may like the usage of another master, who gives you fair promises at least to come to him? Surely, my friends, of all stupidity in the world, his must be the greatest, who, after robbing a house, runs to the thief-takers for protection. And yet, how are you more wise? You are all seeking comfort from one that has already betrayed you, applying to a more malicious being than any thief-taker of them all; for they only decoy and then hang you; but he decoys and hangs, and, what is worst of all, will not let you loose after the hangman has done.'

"When I had concluded, I received the compliments of my audience, some of whom came and shook me by the hand, swearing that I was a very honest fellow, and that they desired my further acquaintance. I therefore promised to repeat my lecture next day, and actually conceived some hopes of making a reformation here; for it had ever been my opinion, that no man was past the hour of amendment, every heart lying open to the shafts of reproof, if the archer could but take a proper aim."

His wife and children, naturally dissuading him from an effort which seemed to them only to bring ridicule upon him, are met by a grave rebuke; and on the next morning he descends to the common prison, where, he says, he found the prisoners very merry, expecting his arrival, and each prepared to play some jail-trick on the Doctor.

"There was one whose trick gave more universal pleasure than all the rest; for, observing the manner in which I had disposed my books on the table before me, he very dexterously displaced one of them, and put an obscene jest-book of his own in the place. However, I took no notice of all that this mischievous group of little beings could do, but went on, perfectly sensible that what was ridiculous in my attempt would excite mirth only the first or second time, while what was serious would be permanent. My design succeeded, and in less than six days some were penitent, and all attentive.

"It was now that I applauded my perseverance and address, at thus giving sensibility to wretches divested of every moral feeling, and now began to think of doing them temporal services also, by rendering their situation somewhat more comfortable. Their time had hitherto been divided between famine and excess, tumultuous riot and bitter repining. Their only employment was quarreling among each other, playing at cribbage, and cutting tobacco-stoppers. From this last mode of idle industry I took the hint of setting such as choose to work at cutting pegs for tobacconists and shoemakers, the proper

wood being bought by a general subscription, and, when manufactured, sold by my appointment ; so that each earned something every day—a trifle indeed, but sufficient to maintain him.

“I did not stop here, but instituted fines for the punishment of immorality, and rewards for peculiar industry. Thus, in less than a fortnight, I had formed them into something social and humane, and had the pleasure of regarding myself as a legislator who had brought men from their native ferocity into friendship and obedience.”

Of course, all this about jails and thieves was calculated to shock the nerves of those who liked their literature perfumed with rose-water. Madame Riccoboni, to whom Burke had sent the book, wrote to Garrick, “*Le plaidoyer en faveur des voleurs, des petits larrons, des gens de mauvaises mœurs, est fort éloigné de me plaire.*” Others, no doubt, considered the introduction of Miss Skeggs and Lady Blarney as “vastly low.” But the curious thing is that the literary critics of the day seem to have been altogether silent about the book—perhaps they were “puzzled” by it, as Southey has suggested. Mr. Forster, who took the trouble to search the periodical literature of the time, says that “apart from the bald recitals of the plot, not a word was said in the way of criticism about the book, either in praise or blame.” The *St. James's Chronicle* did not condescend to notice its appearance, and the *Monthly Review* confessed frankly that nothing was to be made of it. The better sort of newspapers, as well as the more dignified reviews, contemptuously left it to the patronage of *Lloyd's Evening Post*, the *London Chronicle*, and journals of that class, which simply informed their readers that a new novel, called the *Vicar of Wakefield*, had been published, that “the editor is Doctor Goldsmith, who has affixed his name to an introductory Advertisement, and that such and such were the incidents of the story.” Even his friends, with the exception of Burke, did not seem to consider that any remarkable new birth in literature had occurred ; and it is probable that this was a still greater disappointment to Goldsmith, who was so anxious to be thought well of at the Club. However, the public took to the story. A second edition was published in May ; a third in August. Goldsmith, it is true, received no pecuniary gain from this success, for, as we have seen, Johnson had sold the novel outright to Francis Newbery ; but his name was growing in importance with the booksellers.

There was need that it should, for his increasing expenses—his fine clothes, his suppers, his whist at the Devil Tavern—were involving him in deeper and deeper difficulties. How was he to extricate himself?—or rather the question that would naturally occur to Goldsmith was how he was to continue that hand-to-mouth existence that had its compensations along with its troubles? Novels like the *Vicar of Wakefield* are not written at a moment's notice, even though any Newbery, judging by results, is willing to double that £60 which



Johnson considered to be a fair price for the story at the time. There was the usual resource of hack-writing ; and, no doubt, Goldsmith was compelled to fall back on that, if only to keep the elder Newbery, in whose debt he was, in good humour. But the author of the *Vicar of Wakefield* may be excused if he looked round to see if there was not some more profitable work for him to turn his hand to. It was at this time that he began to think of writing a comedy.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE GOOD-NATURED MAN.

AMID much miscellaneous work, mostly of the compilation order, the play of the *Good-natured Man* began to assume concrete form ; inso-much that Johnson, always the friend of this erratic Irishman, had promised to write a Prologue for it. It is with regard to this prologue that Boswell tells a foolish and untrustworthy story about Goldsmith. Dr. Johnson had recently been honoured by an interview with his Sovereign ; and the members of the Club were in the habit of flattering him by begging for a repetition of his account of that famous event. On one occasion, during this recital, Boswell relates, Goldsmith “remained unmoved upon a sofa at some distance, affecting not to join in the least in the eager curiosity of the company. He assigned as a reason for his gloom and seeming inattention that he apprehended Johnson had relinquished his purpose of furnishing him with a prologue to his play, with the hopes of which he had been flattered ; but it was strongly suspected that he was fretting with chagrin and envy at the singular honour Doctor Johnson had lately enjoyed. At length the frankness and simplicity of his natural character prevailed. He sprang from the sofa, advanced to Johnson, and, in a kind of flutter, from imagining himself in the situation which he had just been hearing described, exclaimed, ‘Well, you acquitted yourself in this conversation better than I should have done ; for I should have bowed and stammered through the whole of it.’” It is obvious enough that the only part of this anecdote which is quite worthy of credence is the actual phrase used by Goldsmith, which is full of his customary generosity and self-deprecation. All those “suspicions” of his envy of his friend may safely be discarded, for they are mere guesswork ; even though it might have been natural enough for a man like Goldsmith, conscious of his singular and original genius, to measure himself against Johnson, who was merely a man of keen perception and shrewd reasoning, and to compare the deference paid to Johnson with the scant courtesy shown to himself.

As a matter of fact, the Prologue was written by Dr. Johnson ; and the now complete comedy was, after some little arrangement of personal differences between Goldsmith and Garrick, very kindly undertaken by Reynolds, submitted for Garrick's approval. But nothing came of Reynolds's intervention. Perhaps Goldsmith resented Garrick's airs of patronage towards a poor devil of an author ; perhaps Garrick was surprised by the manner in which well-intentioned criticisms were taken ; at all events, after a good deal of shilly-shallying, the play was taken out of Garrick's hands. Fortunately, a project was just at this moment on foot for starting the rival theatre in Covent Garden, under the management of George Colman ; and to Colman Goldsmith's play was forthwith consigned. The play was accepted ; but it was a long time before it was produced ; and in that interval it may fairly be presumed the *res angusta domi* of Goldsmith did not become any more free and generous than before. It was in this interval that the elder Newbery died ; Goldsmith had one patron the less. Another patron who offered himself was civilly bowed to the door. This is an incident in Goldsmith's career which, like his interview with the Earl of Northumberland, should ever be remembered in his honour. The Government of the day were desirous of enlisting on their behalf the services of writers of somewhat better position than the mere libellers whose pens were the slaves of anybody's purse ; and a Mr. Scott, a chaplain of Lord Sandwich, appears to have imagined that it would be worth while to buy Goldsmith. He applied to Goldsmith in due course ; and this is an account of the interview : "I found him in a miserable set of chambers in the Temple. I told him my authority ; I told him I was empowered to pay most liberally for his exertions ; and, would you believe it ! he was so absurd as to say, 'I can earn as much as will supply my wants without writing for any party ; the assistance you offer is therefore unnecessary to me.' And I left him in his garret." Needy as he was, Goldsmith had too much self-respect to become a paid libeller and cutthroat of public reputations.

On the evening of Friday, the 29th of January, 1768, when Goldsmith had now reached the age of forty, the comedy of *The Good-natured Man* was produced at Covent Garden Theatre. The Prologue had, according to promise, been written by Johnson ; and a very singular prologue it was. Even Boswell was struck by the odd contrast between this sonorous piece of melancholy and the fun that was to follow. "The first lines of this Prologue," he conscientiously remarks, "are strongly characteristic of the dismal gloom of his mind ; which, in his case, as in the case of all who are distressed with the same malady of imagination, transfers to others its own feelings. Who could suppose it was to introduce a comedy, when Mr. Bensley solemnly began—

“ ‘Pressed with the load of life, the weary mind  
 Surveys the general toil of humankind ?’

But this dark ground might make Goldsmith's humour shine the more.” When we come to the comedy itself, we find but little bright humour in the opening passages. The author is obviously timid, anxious, and constrained. There is nothing of the brisk, confident vivacity with which *She Stoops to Conquer* opens. The novice does not yet understand the art of making his characters explain themselves ; and accordingly the benevolent uncle and honest Jarvis indulge in a conversation which, laboriously descriptive of the character of young Honeywood, is spoken “at” the audience. With the entrance of young Honeywood himself, Goldsmith endeavours to become a little more sprightly ; but there is still anxiety hanging over him, and the epigrams are little more than merely formal antitheses.

“*Jarvis.* This bill from your tailor ; this from your mercer ; and this from the little broker in Crooked Lane. He says he has been at a great deal of trouble to get back the money you borrowed.

“*Hon.* That I don't know ; but I'm sure we were at a great deal of trouble in getting him to lend it.

“*Jar.* He has lost all patience.

“*Hon.* Then he has lost a very good thing.

“*Jar.* There's that ten guineas you were sending to the poor gentleman and his children in the Fleet. I believe that would stop his mouth for a while at least.

“*Hon.* Ay, Jarvis, but what will fill their mouths in the meantime ?”

This young Honeywood, the hero of the play, is, and remains throughout, a somewhat ghostly personage. He has attributes, but no flesh or blood. There is much more substance in the next character introduced—the inimitable Croaker, who revels in evil forebodings and drinks deep of the luxury of woe. These are the two chief characters ; but then a play must have a plot. And perhaps it would not be fair, so far as the plot is concerned, to judge of *The Good-natured Man* merely as a literary production. Intricacies that seem tedious and puzzling on paper appear to be clear enough on the stage : it is much more easy to remember the history and circumstances of a person whom we see before us, than to attach these to a mere name—especially as the name is sure to be clipped down from *Honeywood* to *Hon.* and from *Leontine* to *Leon*. However, it is in the midst of all the cross-purposes of the lovers that we once more come upon our old friend Beau Tibbs—though Mr. Tibbs is now in much better circumstances, and has been renamed by his creator Jack Lofty. Garrick had objected to the introduction of Jack, on the ground that he was only a distraction. But Goldsmith, whether in writing a novel or a play, was more anxious to represent human nature than to prune a plot, and paid but little respect to the unities, if only he could arouse our interest. And who is not delighted with this Jack Lofty and his “duch-essy” talk—his airs of patronage, his mysterious hints, his gay familiarity with the great, his audacious lying ?



"*Lofty.* Waller ? Waller ? is he of the house ?

"*Mrs. Croaker.* The modern poet of that name, sir.

"*Lof.* Oh, a modern ! We men of business despise the moderns ; and as for the ancients, we have no time to read them. Poetry is a pretty thing enough for our wives and daughters ; but not for us. Why now, here I stand that know nothing of books. I say, madam, I know nothing of books ; and yet, I believe upon a land-carriage fishery, a stamp act, or a jag-hire, I can talk my two hours without feeling the want of them.

"*Mrs. Cro.* The world is no stranger to Mr. Lofty's eminence in every capacity.

"*Lof.* I vow to gad, madam, you make me blush. I'm nothing, nothing, nothing in the world ; a mere obscure gentleman. To be sure, indeed, one or two of the present ministers are pleased to represent me as a formidable man. I know they are pleased to bespatter me at all their little dirty levees. Yet, upon my soul, I wonder what they see in me to treat me so ! Measures, not men, have always been my mark ; and I vow, by all that's honourable, my resentment has never done the men, as mere men, any manner of harm—that is, as mere men.

"*Mrs. Cro.* What importance, and yet what modesty !

"*Lof.* Oh, if you talk of modesty, madam, there, I own, I'm accessible to praise : modesty is my foible : it was so the Duke of Brentford used to say of me. 'I love Jack Lofty,' he used to say : 'no man has a finer knowledge of things ; quite a man of information ; and when he speaks upon his legs, by the Lord he's prodigious, he scouts them ; and yet all men have their faults ; too much modesty is his,' says his grace.

"*Mrs. Cro.* And yet, I dare say, you don't want assurance when you come to solicit for your friends.

"*Lof.* Oh, there indeed I'm in bronze. Apropos ! I have just been mentioning Miss Richland's case to a certain personage ; we must name no names. When I ask, I am not to be put off, madam. No, no, I take my friend by the button. A fine girl, sir ; great justice in her case. A friend of mine—borough interest—business must be done, Mr. Secretary.—I say, Mr. Secretary, her business must be done, sir. That's my way, madam.

"*Mrs. Cro.* Bless me ! you said all this to the Secretary of State, did you ?

"*Lof.* I did not say the Secretary, did I ? Well, curse it, since you have found me out, I will not deny it. It was to the Secretary."

Strangely enough, what may now seem to some of us the very best scene in the *Good-natured Man*—the scene, that is, in which young Honeywood, suddenly finding Miss Richland without, is compelled to dress up the two bailiffs in possession of his house and introduce them to her as gentlemen friends—was very nearly damning the play on the first night of its production. The pit was of opinion that it was "low ;" and subsequently the critics took up the cry, and professed themselves to be so deeply shocked by the vulgar humours of the bailiffs that Goldsmith had to cut them out. But on the opening night the anxious author, who had been rendered nearly distracted by the cries and hisses produced by this scene, was somewhat reassured when the audience began to laugh again over the tribulations of Mr. Croaker. To the actor who played the part he expressed his warm gratitude when the piece was over ; assuring him that he had exceeded his own conception of the character, and that "the fine comic richness of his colouring made it almost appear as new to him as to any other person in the house."

The new play had been on the whole favourably received ; and, when Goldsmith went along afterwards to the Club, his companions

were doubtless not at all surprised to find him in good spirits. He was even merrier than usual, and consented to sing his favourite ballad about the Old Woman tossed in a Blanket. But those hisses and cries were still rankling in his memory; and he himself subsequently confessed that he was "suffering horrid tortures." Nay, when the other members of the Club had gone, leaving him and Johnson together, he "burst out a-crying, and even swore by — that he would never write again." When Goldsmith told this story in after-days, Johnson was naturally astonished; perhaps—himself not suffering much from an excessive sensitiveness—he may have attributed that little burst of hysterical emotion to the excitement of the evening increased by a glass or two of punch, and determined therefore never to mention it. "All which, Doctor," he said, "I thought had been a secret between you and me; and I am sure I would not have said anything about it for the world." Indeed there was little to cry over, either in the first reception of the piece or in its subsequent fate. With the offending bailiffs cut out, the comedy would seem to have been very fairly successful. The proceeds of three of the evenings were Goldsmith's payment; and in this manner he received £400. Then Griffin published the play; and from this source Goldsmith received an additional £100; so that altogether he was very well paid for his work. Moreover he had appealed against the judgment of the pit and the dramatic critics, by printing in the published edition the bailiff scene which had been removed from the stage; and the *Monthly Review* was so extremely kind as to say that "the bailiff and his blackguard follower appeared intolerable on the stage, yet we are not disgusted with them in the perusal." Perhaps we have grown less scrupulous since then; but at all events it would be difficult for anybody nowadays to find any thing but good-natured fun in that famous scene. There is an occasional "damn," it is true; but then English officers have always been permitted that little playfulness, and these two gentlemen were supposed to "serve in the Fleet;" while if they had been particularly refined in their speech and manner, how could the author have aroused Miss Richland's suspicions? It is possible that the two actors who played the bailiff and his follower may have introduced some vulgar "gag" into their parts; but there is no warranty for anything of the kind in the play as we now read it.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## GOLDSMITH IN SOCIETY.

THE appearance of the *Good-natured Man* ushered in a halcyon period in Goldsmith's life. The *Traveller* and the *Vicar* had gained for him only reputation: this new comedy put £500 in his pocket. Of course that was too big a sum for Goldsmith to have about him long. Four-fifths of it he immediately expended on the purchase and decoration of a set of chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple; with the remainder he appears to have begun a series of entertainments in this new abode, which were perhaps more remarkable for their mirth than their decorum. There was no sort of frolic in which Goldsmith would not indulge for the amusement of his guests; he would sing them songs; he would throw his wig to the ceiling; he would dance a minuet. And then they had cards, forfeits, blind-man's-buff, until Mr. Blackstone, then engaged on his *Commentaries* in the rooms below, was driven nearly mad by the uproar. These parties would seem to have been of a most nondescript character—chance gatherings of any obscure authors or actors whom he happened to meet; but from time to time there were more formal entertainments, at which Johnson, Percy, and similar distinguished persons were present. Moreover, Dr. Goldsmith himself was much asked out to dinner too; and so, not content with the “Tyrian bloom, satin grain and garter, blue silk breeches,” which Mr. Filby had provided for the evening of the production of the comedy, he now had another suit “lined with silk, and gold buttons,” that he might appear in proper guise. Then he had his airs of consequence too. This was his answer to an invitation from Kelly, who was his rival of the hour: “I would with pleasure accept your kind invitation, but to tell you the truth, my dear boy, my *Traveller* has found me a home in so many places, that I am engaged, I believe, three days. Let me see. To-day I dine with Edmund Burke, to-morrow with Dr. Nugent, and the next day with Topham Beauclerk; but I'll tell you what I'll do for you, I'll dine with you on Saturday.” Kelly told this story as against Goldsmith; but surely there is not so much ostentation in the reply. Directly after *Tristram Shandy* was published, Sterne found himself fourteen deep in dinner engagements: why should not the author of the *Traveller* and the *Vicar* and the *Good-natured Man* have his engagements also? And perhaps it was but right that Mr. Kelly, who was after all only a critic and scribbler, though he had written a play which was for the moment enjoying an undeserved popularity, should be given to understand that Dr. Goldsmith was not to be asked to a hole-and-corner chop at a moment's notice. To-day he dines with Mr. Burke; to-



morrow with Dr. Nugent ; the day after with Mr. Beauclerk. If you wish to have the honour of his company, you may choose a day after that ; and then, with his new wig, with his coat of Tyrian bloom and blue-silk breeches, with a smart sword at his side, his gold-headed cane in his hand, and his hat under his elbow, he will present himself in due course. Dr. Goldsmith is announced, and makes his grave bow : this is the man of genius about whom all the town is talking ; the friend of Burke, of Reynolds, of Johnson, of Hogarth ; this is not the ragged Irishman who was some time ago earning a crust by running errands for an apothecary.

Goldsmith's grand airs, however, were assumed but seldom : and they were never imposed on anybody. His acquaintances treated him with a familiarity which testified rather to his good-nature than to their good taste. Now and again, indeed, he was prompted to resent this familiarity ; but the effort was not successful. In the "high jinks" to which he good-humouredly resorted for the entertainment of his guests he permitted a freedom which it was afterwards not very easy to discard ; and as he was always ready to make a butt of himself for the amusement of his friends and acquaintances, it came to be recognized that anybody was allowed to play off a joke on "Goldy." The jokes, such of them as have been put on record, are of the poorest sort. The horse-collar is never far off. One gladly turns from these dismal humours of the tavern and the club to the picture of Goldsmith's enjoying what he called a "Shoemaker's Holiday" in the company of one or two chosen intimates. Goldsmith, baited and bothered by the wits of a public-house, became a different being when he had assumed the guidance of a small party of chosen friends bent on having a day's frugal pleasure. We are indebted to one Cooke, a neighbour of Goldsmith's in the Temple, not only for a most interesting description of one of these shoemaker's holidays, but also for the knowledge that Goldsmith had even now begun writing the *Deserted Village*, which was not published till 1770, two years later. Goldsmith, though he could turn out plenty of manufactured stuff for the booksellers, worked slowly at the special story or poem with which he meant to "strike for honest fame." This Mr. Cooke, calling on him one morning, discovered that Goldsmith had that day written these ten lines of the *Deserted Village* :

"Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
 Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,  
 How often have I loitered o'er thy green,  
 Where humble happiness endeared each scene !  
 How often have I paused on every charm,  
 The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,  
 The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
 The decent church, that topt the neighbouring hill,  
 The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,  
 For talking age and whispering lovers made !"

"Come," said he, "let me tell you this is no bad morning's work ; and now, my dear boy, if you are not better engaged, I should be glad to enjoy a shoemaker's holiday with you." "A shoemaker's holiday," continues the writer of these reminiscences, "was a day of great festivity to poor Goldsmith, and was spent in the following innocent manner : Three or four of his intimate friends rendezvoused at his chambers to breakfast about ten o'clock in the morning ; at eleven they proceeded by the City Road and through the fields to Highbury Barn to dinner ; about six o'clock in the evening they adjourned to White Conduit House to drink tea ; and concluded by supping at the Grecian or Temple Exchange coffee-house or at the Globe in Fleet Street. There was a very good ordinary of two dishes and pastry kept at Highbury Barn about this time at tenpence per head, including a penny to the waiter ; and the company generally consisted of literary characters, a few Templars, and some citizens who had left off trade. The whole expenses of the day's fête never exceeded a crown, and oftener were from three-and-sixpence to four shillings ; for which the party obtained good air and exercise, good living, the example of simple manners, and good conversation."

It would have been well indeed for Goldsmith had he been possessed of sufficient strength of character to remain satisfied with these simple pleasures, and to have lived the quiet and modest life of a man of letters on such income as he could derive from the best work he could produce. But it is this same Mr. Cooke who gives decisive testimony as to Goldsmith's increasing desire to "shine" by imitating the expenditure of the great ; the natural consequence of which was that he only plunged himself into a morass of debt, advances, contracts for hack-work, and misery. "His debts rendered him at times so melancholy and dejected, that I am sure he felt himself a very unhappy man." Perhaps it was with some sudden resolve to flee from temptation, and grapple with the difficulties that beset him, that he, in conjunction with another Temple neighbour, Mr. Bott, rented a cottage some eight miles down the Edgware Road ; and here he set to work on the *History of Rome*, which he was writing for Davies. Apart from this hack-work, now rendered necessary by his debt, it is probable that one strong inducement leading him to this occasional seclusion was the progress he might be able to make with the *Deserted Village*. Amid all his town gayeties and country excursions, amid his dinners and suppers and dances, his borrowings, and contracts, and the hurried literary produce of the moment, he never forgot what was due to his reputation as an English poet. The journalistic bullies of the day might vent their spleen and envy on him ; his best friends might smile at his conversational failures ; the wits of the tavern might put up the horse-collar as before ; but at least he had the consolation of his art. No one better knew than himself the value of those finished and musical lines he was gradually adding to the beautiful poem, the

grace, the sweetness, and tender, pathetic charm of which make it one of the literary treasures of the English people.

The sorrows of debt were not Goldsmith's only trouble at this time. For some reason or other he seems to have become the especial object of spiteful attack on the part of the literary cutthroats of the day. And Goldsmith, though he might listen with respect to the wise advice of Johnson on such matters, was never able to cultivate Johnson's habit of absolute indifference to any thing that might be said or sung of him. "The Kenricks, Campbells, MacNicol's, and Hendersons," says Lord Macaulay—speaking of Johnson, "did their best to annoy him, in the hope that he would give them importance by answering them. But the reader will in vain search his works for any allusion to Kenrick or Campbell, to MacNicol or Henderson. One Scotchman, bent on vindicating the fame of Scotch learning, defied him to the combat in a detestable Latin hexameter—

‘Maxime, si tu vis, copio contendere tecum.’

But Johnson took no notice of the challenge. He had learned, both from his own observation and from literary history, in which he was deeply read, that the place of books in the public estimation is fixed, not by what is written about them, but by what is written in them; and that an author whose works are likely to live is very unwise if he stoops to wrangle with detractors whose works are certain to die. He always maintained that fame was a shuttlecock which could be kept up only by being beaten back, as well as beaten forward, and which would soon fall if there were only one battledore. No saying was oftener in his mouth than that fine apophthegm of Bentley, that no man was ever written down but by himself."

It was not given to Goldsmith to feel "like the Monument" on any occasion whatsoever. He was anxious to have the esteem of his friends; he was sensitive to a degree; denunciation or malice, begotten of envy that Johnson would have passed unheeded, wounded him to the quick. "The insults to which he had to submit," Thackeray wrote with a quick and warm sympathy, "are shocking to read of—slander, contumely, vulgar satire, brutal malignity perverting his commonest motives and actions: he had his share of these, and one's anger is roused at reading of them, as it is at seeing a woman insulted or a child assaulted, at the notion that a creature so very gentle, and weak, and full of love should have had to suffer so." Goldsmith's revenge, his defence of himself, his appeal to the public, were the *Traveller*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, the *Deserted Village*; but these came at long intervals; and in the meantime he had to bear with the anonymous malignity that pursued him as best he might. No doubt, when Burke was entertaining him at dinner, and when Johnson was openly deferring to him in conversation at the Club, and when Rey-



nolds was painting his portrait, he could afford to forget Mr. Kenrick and the rest of the libelling clan.

The occasions on which Johnson deferred to Goldsmith in conversation were no doubt few ; but at all events the bludgeon of the great Cham would appear to have come down less frequently on "honest Goldy" than on the other members of that famous coterie. It could come down heavily enough. "Sir," said an incautious person, "drinking drives away care, and makes us forget whatever is disagreeable. Would not you allow a man to drink for that reason?" "Yes, sir," was the reply, "if he sat next *you*." Johnson, however, was considerate towards Goldsmith, partly because of his affection for him, and partly because he saw under what disadvantages Goldsmith entered the lists. For one thing, the conversation of those evenings would seem to have drifted continually into the mere definition of phrases. Now Johnson had spent years of his life, during the compilation of his Dictionary, in doing nothing else but defining ; and, whenever the dispute took a phraseological turn, he had it all his own way. Goldsmith, on the other hand, was apt to become confused in his eager self-consciousness. "Goldsmith," said Johnson to Boswell, "should not be forever attempting to shine in conversation ; he has not temper for it, he is so much mortified when he fails. . . . When he contends, if he gets the better, it is a very little addition to a man of his literary reputation : if he does not get the better, he is miserably vexed." Boswell, nevertheless, admits that Goldsmith was "often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson himself," and goes on to tell how Goldsmith, relating the fable of the little fishes who petitioned Jupiter, and perceiving that Johnson was laughing at him, immediately said, "Why, Dr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think ; for if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like WHALES." Who but Goldsmith would have dared to play jokes on the sage? At supper they have rumps and kidneys. The sage expresses his approval of "the pretty little things ;" but profoundly observes that one must eat a good many of them before being satisfied. "Ay, but how many of them," asks Goldsmith, "would reach to the moon?" The sage professes his ignorance ; and, indeed, remarks that that would exceed even Goldsmith's calculations ; when the practical joker observes, "Why, *one*, sir, if it were long enough." Johnson was completely beaten on this occasion. "Well, sir, I have deserved it. I should not have provoked so foolish an answer by so foolish a question."

It was Johnson himself, moreover, who told the story of Goldsmith and himself being in Poets' Corner ; of his saying to Goldsmith,

"*Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis,*"

and of Goldsmith subsequently repeating the quotation when, having

walked towards Fleet Street, they were confronted by the heads on Temple Bar. Even when Goldsmith was opinionated and wrong, Johnson's contradiction was in a manner gentle. "If you put a tub full of blood into a stable, the horses are like to go mad," observed Goldsmith. "I doubt that," was Johnson's reply. "Nay, sir, it is a fact well authenticated." Here Thrale interposed to suggest that Goldsmith should have the experiment tried in the stable; but Johnson merely said that, if Goldsmith began making these experiments, he would never get his book written at all. Occasionally, of course, Goldsmith was tossed and gored just like another. "But, sir," he had ventured to say, in opposition to Johnson, "when people live together who have something as to which they disagree, and which they want to shun, they will be in the situation mentioned in the story of Bluebeard, 'You may look into all the chambers but one.' But we should have the greatest inclination to look into that chamber, to talk of that subject." Here, according to Boswell, Johnson answered in a loud voice, "Sir, I am not saying that *you* could live in friendship with a man from whom you differ as to one point: I am only saying that *I* could do it." But then again he could easily obtain pardon from the gentle Goldsmith for any occasional rudeness. One evening they had a sharp passage of arms at dinner; and thereafter the company adjourned to the Club, where Goldsmith sat silent and depressed. "Johnson perceived this," says Boswell, "and said aside to some of us, 'I'll make Goldsmith forgive me;' and then called to him in a loud voice, 'Dr. Goldsmith, something passed to-day where you and I dined: I ask your pardon.' Goldsmith answered placidly, 'It must be much from you, sir, that I take ill.' And so at once the difference was over, and they were on as easy terms as ever, and Goldsmith rattled away as usual." For the rest, Johnson was the constant and doughty champion of Goldsmith as a man of letters. He would suffer no one to doubt the power and versatility of that genius which he had been amongst the first to recognize and encourage.

"Whether, indeed, we take him as a poet, as a comic writer, or as an historian," he announced to an assemblage of distinguished persons met together at dinner at Mr. Beauclerk's "*he stands in the first class.*" And there was no one living who dared dispute the verdict—at least in Johnson's hearing.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

BUT it is time to return to the literary performances that gained for this uncouth Irishman so great an amount of consideration from the first men of his time. The engagement with Griffin about the *History of Animated Nature* was made at the beginning of 1769. The work was to occupy eight volumes ; and Dr. Goldsmith was to receive eight hundred guineas for the complete copyright. Whether the undertaking was originally a suggestion of Griffin's or of Goldsmith's own does not appear. If it was the author's, it was probably only the first means that occurred to him of getting another advance ; and that advance—£500 on account—he did actually get. But if it was the suggestion of the publisher, Griffin must have been a bold man. A writer whose acquaintance with animated nature was such as to allow him to make the “insidious tiger” a denizen of the backwoods of Canada,\* was not a very safe authority. But perhaps Griffin had consulted Johnson before making this bargain ; and we know that Johnson, though continually remarking on Goldsmith's extraordinary ignorance of facts, was of opinion that the *History of Animated Nature* would be “as entertaining as a Persian tale.” However, Goldsmith—no doubt after he had spent the five hundred guineas—tackled the work in earnest. When Boswell subsequently went out to call on him at another rural retreat he had taken on the Edgware Road, Boswell and Mickle, the translator of the *Lusiad*, found Goldsmith from home ; “but, having a curiosity to see his apartment, we went in and found curious scraps of descriptions of animals scrawled upon the wall with a black-lead pencil.” Meanwhile, this *Animated Nature* being in hand, the *Roman History* was published, and was very well received by the critics and by the public. “Goldsmith's abridgment,” Johnson declared, “is better than that of Lucius Florus or Eutropius ; and I will venture to say that if you compare him with Vertot, in the same places of the *Roman History*, you will find that he excels Vertot. Sir, he has the art of compiling, and of saying every thing he has to say in a pleasing manner.”

So thought the booksellers too ; and the success of the *Roman History* only involved him in fresh projects of compilation. By an offer of £500 Davies induced him to lay aside for the moment the *Animated Nature* and begin “An History of England, from the Birth of the British Empire to the death of George the Second, in four volumes octavo.” He also about this time undertook to write a Life of Thomas Parnell. Here, indeed, was plenty of work, and work promising good

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\* See *Citizen of the World*, Letter XVII.



pay ; but the depressing thing is that Goldsmith should have been the man who had to do it. He may have done it better than any one else could have done—indeed, looking over the results of all that drudgery, we recognize now the happy turns of expression which were never long absent from Goldsmith's prose-writing—but the world could well afford to sacrifice all the task-work thus got through for another poem like the *Deserted Village* or the *Traveller*. Perhaps Goldsmith considered he was making a fair compromise when, for the sake of his reputation, he devoted a certain portion of his time to his poetical work, and then, to have money for fine clothes and high jinks, gave the rest to the booksellers. One critic, on the appearance of the *Roman History*, referred to the *Traveller*, and remarked that it was a pity that the "author of one of the best poems that has appeared since those of Mr. Pope, should not apply wholly to works of imagination." We may echo that regret now ; but Goldsmith would at the time have no doubt replied that, if he had trusted to his poems, he would never have been able to pay £400 for chambers in the temple. In fact he said as much to Lord Lisburn at one of the Academy dinners : "I cannot afford to court the draggle-tail muses, my Lord ; they would let me starve ; but by my other labours I can make shift to eat and drink and have good clothes." And there is little use in our regretting now that Goldsmith was not cast in a more heroic mold ; we have to take him as he is ; and be grateful for what he has left us.

It is a grateful relief to turn from these booksellers' contracts and forced labours to the sweet clear note of singing that one finds in the *Deserted Village*. This poem, after having been repeatedly announced and as often withdrawn for further revision, was at last published on the 26th of May, 1770, when Goldsmith was in his forty-second year. The leading idea of it he had already thrown out in certain lines in the *Traveller* :

"Have we not seen, round Britain's peopled shore,  
Her useful sons exchanged for useless ore ?  
Seen all her triumphs but destruction haste,  
Like flaring tapers brightening as they waste ?  
Seen opulence, her grandeur to maintain,  
Lead stern depopulation in her train,  
And over fields where scattered hamlets rose  
In barren solitary pomp repose ?  
Have we not seen at pleasure's lordly call  
The smiling long-frequented village fall ?  
Beheld the dateous son, the sire decayed,  
The modest matron, and the blushing maid,  
Forced from their homes, a melancholy train,  
To traverse climes beyond the western main ;  
Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps around,  
And Niagara stuns with thundering sound ?"

—and elsewhere, in recorded conversations of his, we find that he had somehow got it into his head that the accumulation of wealth in a

country was the parent of all evils, including depopulation. We need not stay here to discuss Goldsmith's position as a political economist ; even although Johnson seems to sanction his theory in the four lines he contributed to the end of the poem. Nor is it worth while returning to that objection of Lord Macaulay's which has already been mentioned in these pages, further than to repeat that the poor Irish village in which Goldsmith was brought up, no doubt looked to him as charming as any Auburn, when he regarded it through the softening and beautifying mist of years. It is enough that the abandonment by a number of poor people of the homes in which they and theirs have lived their lives, is one of the most pathetic facts in our civilization ; and that out of the various circumstances surrounding this forced migration Goldsmith has made one of the most graceful and touching poems in the English language. It is clear bird-singing ; but there is a pathetic note in it. That imaginary ramble through the Lissoy that is far away has recalled more than his boyish sports ; it has made him look back over his own life—the life of an exile.

“I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,  
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down ;  
To husband out life's taper at the close,  
And keep the flame from wasting by repose :  
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still.  
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,  
Around my fire an evening group to draw,  
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw :  
And, 's a hare whom hounds and horns pursue,  
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,  
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,  
Here to return—and die at home at last.”

Who can doubt that it was of Lissoy he was thinking ? Sir Walter Scott, writing a generation ago, said that “ the church which tops the neighbouring hill,” the mill and the brook were still to be seen in the Irish village ; and that even

“The hawthorn bush with seats beneath the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers made,”

had been identified by the indefatigable tourist, and was of course being cut to pieces to make souvenirs. But indeed it is of little consequence whether we say that Auburn is an English village, or insist that it is only Lissoy idealized, as long as the thing is true in itself. And we know that this is true : it is not that one sees the place as a picture, but that one seems to be breathing its very atmosphere, and listening to the various cries that thrill the “ hollow silence.”

“Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's close  
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose.

There, as I past with careless steps and slow,  
 The mingling notes came softly from below ;  
 The swain responsive as the milkmaid sung,  
 The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,  
 The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,  
 The playful children just let loose from school.  
 The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,  
 And the loud laugh that spake the vacant mind."

Nor is it any romantic and impossible peasantry that is gradually brought before us. There are no Norvals in Lissoy. There is the old woman—Catherine Geraghty, they say, was her name—who gathered cresses in the ditches near her cabin. There is the village preacher whom Mrs. Hodson, Goldsmith's sister, took to be a portrait of their father ; but whom others have identified as Henry Goldsmith, and even as the uncle Contarine ; they may all have contributed. And then comes Paddy Byrne. Amid all the pensive tenderness of the poem this description of the schoolmaster, with its strokes of demure humour, is introduced with delightful effect:

"Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,  
 With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,  
 There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,  
 The village master taught his little school.  
 A man severe he was, and stern to view ;  
 I knew him well, and every truant knew ;  
 Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
 The day's disasters in his morning face :  
 Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee  
 At all his jokes, for many a joke had he :  
 Full well the busy whisper circling round  
 Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned.  
 Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,  
 The love he bore to learning was in fault.  
 The village all declared how much he knew :  
 'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too :  
 Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,  
 And e'en the story ran that he could gauge :  
 In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,  
 For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still ;  
 While words of learned length and thundering sound  
 Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around ;  
 And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew  
 That one small head could carry all he knew."

All this is so simple and natural that we cannot fail to believe in the reality of Auburn, or Lissoy, or whatever the village may be supposed to be. We visit the clergyman's cheerful fireside ; and look in on the noisy school ; and sit in the evening in the ale-house to listen to the profound politics talked there. But the crisis comes. Auburn *delenda est*. Here, no doubt, occurs the least probable part of the poem. Poverty of soil is a common cause of emigration ; land that produces oats (when it can produce oats at all) three-fourths mixed



with weeds, and hay chiefly consisting of rushes, naturally discharges its surplus population as families increase; and though the wrench of parting is painful enough, the usual result is a change from starvation to competence. It more rarely happens that a district of peace and plenty, such as Auburn was supposed to see around it, is depopulated to add to a great man's estate.

"The man of wealth and pride  
Takes up a space that many poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,  
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds:  
\* \* \* \* \*  
His seat, where solitary sports are seen,  
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green;"

and so forth. This seldom happens; but it does happen; and it has happened, in our own day, in England. It is within the last twenty years that an English landlord, having faith in his riches, bade a village be removed and cast elsewhere, so that it should no longer be visible from his windows: and it was forthwith removed. But any solitary instance like this is not sufficient to support the theory that wealth and luxury are inimical to the existence of a hardy peasantry; and so we must admit, after all, that it is poetical exigency rather than political economy that has decreed the destruction of the loveliest village of the plain. Where, asks the poet, are the driven poor to find refuge, when even the fenceless commons are seized upon and divided by the rich? In the great cities?—

"To see profusion that he must not share;  
To see ten thousand baneful arts combined  
To pamper luxury and thin mankind."

It is in this description of a life in cities that there occurs an often-quoted passage, which has in it one of the most perfect lines in English poetry:

"Ah! turn thy eyes  
Where the poor houseless shivering female lies.  
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,  
Has wept at tales of innocence distress;  
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,  
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;  
Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,  
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head.  
And, pinched with cold, and shrinking from the shower,  
With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,  
When idly first, ambitious of the town,  
She left her wheel and robes of country brown."

Goldsmith wrote in a pre-Wordsworthian age, when, even in the realms of poetry, a primrose was not much more than a primrose;

but it is doubtful whether, either before, during, or since Wordsworth's time, the sentiment that the imagination can infuse into the common and familiar things around us ever received more happy expression than in the well-known line,

*"Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn."*

No one has as yet succeeded in defining accurately and concisely what poetry is; but at all events this line is surcharged with a certain quality which is conspicuously absent in such a production as the *Essay on Man*. Another similar line is to be found further on in the description of the distant scenes to which the proscribed people are driven :

*"Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,  
Where wild Aitama murmurs to their woe."*

Indeed, the pathetic side of emigration has never been so powerfully presented to us as in this poem :

*"When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,  
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked their last,  
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain  
For seats like these beyond the western main,  
And shuddering still to face the distant deep.  
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.*

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

*Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,  
I see the rural virtues leave the land.  
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail,  
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,  
Downward they move a melancholy band,  
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.  
Contented toil, and hospitable care,  
And kind connubial tenderness are there ;  
And piety with wishes placed above,  
And steady loyalty, and faithful love."*

And worst of all, in this imaginative departure, we find that Poetry herself is leaving our shores. She is now to try her voice

*"On Torno's cliffs or Pambamarca's side ;"*

and the poet, in the closing lines of the poem, bids her a passionate and tender farewell

*"And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,  
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade ;  
Unfit in these degenerate times of shame  
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame ;  
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,  
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride ;  
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,  
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so ;*

Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,  
 Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well !  
 Farewell, and oh ! where'er thy voice be tried,  
 On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,  
 Whether where equinoctial fervours glow,  
 Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,  
 Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,  
 Redress the rigours of the inclement clime ;  
 Aid sl ghted truth with thy persuasive strain ;  
 Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain :  
 Teach him, that states of native strength possess,  
 Though very poor, may still be very blest ;  
 That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,  
 As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away ;  
 While self-dependent power can time defy,  
 As rocks resist the billows and the sky."

So ends this graceful, melodious, tender poem, the position of which in English literature, and in the estimation of all who love English literature, has not been disturbed by any fluctuations of literary fashion. We may give more attention at the moment to the new experiments of the poetic method ; but we return only with renewed gratitude to the old familiar strain, not the least merit of which is that it has nothing about it of foreign tricks or graces. In English literature there is nothing more thoroughly English than these writings produced by an Irishman. And whether or not it was Paddy Byrne, and Catharine Geraghty, and the Lissoy ale-house that Goldsmith had in his mind when he was writing the poem, is not of much consequence : the manner and language and feeling are all essentially English ; so that we never think of calling Goldsmith anything but an English poet.

The poem met with great and immediate success. Of course every thing that Dr. Goldsmith now wrote was read by the public ; he had not to wait for the recommendation of the reviews ; but, in this case, even the reviews had scarcely any thing but praise in the welcome of his new book. It was dedicated, in graceful and ingenious terms, to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who returned the compliment by painting a picture and placing on the engraving of it this inscription : " This attempt to express a character in the *Deserted Village* is dedicated to Dr. Goldsmith by his sincere friend and admirer, Sir Joshua Reynolds." What Goldsmith got from Griffin for the poem is not accurately known ; and this is a misfortune, for the knowledge would have enabled us to judge whether at that time it was possible for a poet to court the draggle-tail muses without risk of starvation. But if fame were his chief object in the composition of the poem, he was sufficiently rewarded ; and it is to be surmised that by this time the people in Ireland—no longer implored to get subscribers—had heard of the proud position won by the vagrant youth who had " taken the world for his pillow " some eighteen years before.

That his own thoughts had sometimes wandered back to the scenes



and friends of his youth during this labour of love, we know from his letters. In January of this year, while as yet the *Deserted Village* was not quite through the press, he wrote to his brother Maurice; and expressed himself as most anxious to hear all about the relatives from whom he had been so long parted. He has something to say about himself too; wishes it to be known that the King has lately been pleased to make him Professor of Ancient History "in a Royal Academy of Painting which he has just established;" but gives no very flourishing account of his circumstances. "Honours to one in my situation are something like ruffles to a man that wants a shirt." However, there is some small legacy of fourteen or fifteen pounds left him by his uncle Contarine, which he understands to be in the keeping of his cousin Lawder; and to this wealth he is desirous of foregoing all claim: his relations must settle how it may be best expended. But there is not a reference to his literary achievements, or the position won by them; not the slightest yielding to even a pardonable vanity; it is a modest, affectionate letter. The only hint that Maurice Goldsmith receives of the esteem in which his brother is held in London, is contained in a brief mention of Johnson, Burke, and others as his friends. "I have sent my cousin Jenny a miniature picture of myself, as I believe it is the most acceptable present I can offer. I have ordered it to be left for her at George Faulkenor's, folded in a letter. The face, you well know, is ugly enough; but it is finely painted. I will shortly also send my friends over the Shannon some mezzotinto prints of myself, and some more of my friends here, such as Burke, Johnson, Reynolds, and Colman. I believe I have written an hundred letters to different friends in your country, and never received an answer from any of them. I do not know how to account for this, or why they are unwilling to keep up for me those regards which I must ever retain for them." The letter winds up with an appeal for news, news, news.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### OCCASIONAL WRITINGS.

SOME two months after the publication of the *Deserted Village*, when its success had been well assured, Goldsmith proposed to himself the relaxation of a little Continental tour; and he was accompanied by three ladies, Mrs. Horneck and her two pretty daughters, who doubtless took more charge of him than he did of them. This Mrs. Horneck, the widow of a certain Captain Horneck, was connected with Reynolds, while Burke was the guardian of the two girls; so that it was natural that they should make the acquaintance of Dr. Goldsmith.

A foolish attempt has been made to weave out of the relations supposed to exist between the younger of the girls and Goldsmith an imaginary romance; but there is not the slightest actual foundation for any thing of the kind. Indeed the best guide we can have to the friendly and familiar terms on which he stood with regard to the Hornecks and their circle, is the following careless and jocular reply to a chance invitation sent him by the two sisters :

“Your mandate I got,  
 You may all go to pot;  
 Had your senses been right,  
 You'd have sent before night;  
 As I hope to be saved,  
 I put off being shaved:  
 For I could not make bold,  
 While the matter was cold,  
 To meddle in suds,  
 Or to put on my duds;  
 So tell Horneck and Nesbitt  
 And Baker and his bit,  
 And Kauffman beside,  
 And the Jessamy bride;  
 With the rest of the crew,  
 The Reynoldses two,  
 Little Comedy's face  
 And the Captain in lace.

\* \* \* \*

Yet how can I when vexed  
 Thus stray from my text?  
 Tell each other to rue  
 Your Devonshire crew,  
 For sending so late  
 To one of my state.  
 But 'tis Reynolds's way  
 From wisdom to stray,  
 And Angelica's whim  
 To be frolic like him.

But, alas! your good worships, how could they be wiser,  
 When both have been spoiled in to-day's *Advertiser*?”

“The Jessamy Bride” was the pet nickname he had bestowed on the younger Miss Horneck—the heroine of the speculative romance just mentioned; “Little Comedy” was her sister; “the Captain in lace” her brother, who was in the Guards. No doubt Mrs. Horneck and her daughters were very pleased to have with them on this Continental trip so distinguished a person as Dr. Goldsmith; and he must have been very ungrateful if he was not glad to be provided with such charming companions. The story of the sudden envy he displayed at the admiration excited by the two handsome young Englishwomen as they stood at a hotel-window in Lille, is so incredibly foolish that it needs scarcely be repeated here; unless to repeat the warning that if ever anybody was so dense as not to see the humour of that piece of acting, one had better look with grave suspicion on every one of the stories told about Goldsmith's vanities and absurdities.

Even with such pleasant companions, the trip to Paris was not everything he had hoped. "I find," he wrote to Reynolds from Paris, "that travelling at twenty and at forty are very different things. I set out with all my confirmed habits about me, and can find nothing on the Continent so good as when I formerly left it. One of our chief amusements here is scolding at every thing we meet with, and praising every thing and every person we left at home. You may judge therefore whether your name is not frequently bandied at table among us. To tell you the truth, I never thought I could regret your absence so much, as our various mortifications on the road have often taught me to do. I could tell you of disasters and adventures without number, of our lying in barns, and of my being half poisoned with a dish of green peas, of our quarrelling with postilions and being cheated by our landladies, but I reserve all this for a happy hour which I expect to share with you upon my return." The fact is that although Goldsmith had seen a good deal of foreign travel, the manner of his making the grand tour in his youth was not such as to fit him for acting as courier to a party of ladies. However, if they increased his troubles, they also shared them; and in this same letter he bears explicit testimony to the value of their companionship. "I will soon be among you, better pleased with my situation at home than I ever was before. And yet I must say, that if any thing could make France pleasant, the very good women with whom I am at present would certainly do it. I could say more about that, but I intend showing them this letter before I send it away." Mrs. Horneck, *Little Comedy*, the *Jessamy Bride*, and the Professor of Ancient History at the Royal Academy, all returned to London; the last to resume his round of convivialities at taverns, excursions into regions of more fashionable amusement along with Reynolds, and task-work aimed at the pockets of the booksellers.

It was a happy-go-lucky sort of life. We find him now showing off his fine clothes and his sword and wig at Ranelagh Gardens, and again shut up in his chambers compiling memoirs and histories in hot haste; now the guest of Lord Clare, and figuring at Bath, and again delighting some small domestic circle by his quips and cranks; playing jokes for the amusement of children, and writing comic letters in verse to their elders; everywhere and at all times merry, thoughtless, good-natured. And, of course, we find also his humorous pleasantries being mistaken for blundering stupidity. In perfect good faith Boswell describes how a number of people burst out laughing when Goldsmith publicly complained that he had met Lord Camden at Lord Clare's house in the country, "and he took no more notice of me than if I had been an ordinary man." Goldsmith's claiming to be a very extraordinary person was precisely a stroke of that humor self-depreciation in which he was continually indulging; and the *Jessamy Bride* has left it on record that "on many occasions, from the peculiar man-



ner of his humour, and assumed frown of countenance, what was often uttered in jest was mistaken by those who did not know him for earnest." This would appear to have been one of those occasions. The company burst out laughing at Goldsmith's having made a fool of himself; and Johnson was compelled to come to his rescue. "Nay, gentlemen, Dr. Goldsmith is in the right. A nobleman ought to have made up to such a man as Goldsmith; and I think it is much against Lord Camden that he neglected him."

Mention of Lord Clare naturally recalls the *Haunch of Venison*. Goldsmith was particularly happy in writing bright and airy verses; the grace and lightness of his touch has rarely been approached. It must be confessed, however, that in this direction he was somewhat of an Autolycus; unconsidered trifles he freely appropriated; but he committed these thefts with scarcely any concealment, and with the most charming air in the world. In fact some of the snatches of verse which he contributed to the *Bee* scarcely profess to be any thing else than translations, though the originals are not given. But who is likely to complain when we get as the result such a delightful piece of nonsense as the famous Elegy on that Glory of her Sex, Mrs. Mary Blaize, which has been the parent of a vast progeny since Goldsmith's time?

"Good people all, with one accord  
Lament for Madam Blaize,  
Who never wanted a good word  
From those who spoke her praise.

"The needy seldom passed her door,  
And always found her kind;  
She freely lent to all the poor—  
Who left a pledge behind.

"She strove the neighbourhood to please,  
With manners wondrous winning;  
And never followed wicked ways—  
Unless when she was sinning.

"At church, in silks and satins new,  
With hoop of monstrous size,  
She never slumbered in her pew—  
But when she shut her eyes.

"Her love was sought, I do aver,  
By twenty beaux and more;  
The king himself has followed her—  
When she has walked before.

"But now her wealth and finery fled,  
Her hangers-on cut short all;  
The doctors found, when she was dead—  
Her last disorder mortal.

“ Let us lament, in sorrow sore,  
 For Kent Street well may say,  
 That had she lived a twelvemonth more—  
 She had not died to-day.”

The *Haunch of Venison*, on the other hand, is a poetical letter of thanks to Lord Clare—an easy, jocular epistle, in which the writer has a cut or two at certain of his literary brethren. Then, as he is looking at the venison, and determining not to send it to any such people as Hiffernan or Higgins, who should step in but our old friend Beau Tibbs, or some one remarkably like him in manner and speech?—

“ While thus I debated, in reverie centred,  
 An acquaintance, a friend as he called himself, entered ;  
 An under-bred, fine-spoken fellow was he,  
 And he smiled as he looked at the venison and me.  
 ‘ What have we got here ?—Why this is good eating !  
 Your own, I suppose—or is it in waiting ? ’  
 ‘ Why, whose should it be ? ’ cried I with a founce ;  
 ‘ I get these things often ’—but that was a bounce :  
 ‘ Some lords, my acquaintance, that settle the nation,  
 Are pleased to be kind—but I hate ostentation.’  
 ‘ If that be the case, then,’ cried he very gay,  
 ‘ I’m glad I have taken this house in my way.  
 To-morrow you take a poor dinner with me ;  
 No words—I insist on t—precisely at three ;  
 We’ll have Johnson, and Burke ; all the wits will be there ;  
 My acquaintance is slight, or I’d ask my Lord Clare.  
 And now that I think on’t, as I am a sinner !  
 We wanted this venison to make out the dinner.  
 What say you—a pasty ? It shall and it must,  
 And my wife, little Kitty, is famous for crust.  
 Here, porter ! this venison with me to Mile End ;  
 No stirring—I beg—my dear friend—my dear friend ! ’  
 Thus, snatching his hat, he brushed off like the wind  
 And the porter and eatables followed behind.”

We need not follow the vanished venison—which did not make its appearance at the banquet any more than did Johnson or Burke—further than to say that if Lord Clare did not make it good to the poet he did not deserve to have his name associated with such a clever and careless *jeu d’esprit*.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER.

BUT the writing of smart verses could not keep Dr. Goldsmith alive, more especially as dinner-parties, Ranelagh masquerades, and similar diversions pressed heavily on his finances. When his *History of England* appeared, the literary cutthroats of the day accused him of having been bribed by the Government to betray the liberties of the people : \* a foolish charge. What Goldsmith got for the *English History* was the sum originally stipulated for, and now no doubt all spent ; with a further sum of fifty guineas for an abridgment of the work. Then, by this time, he had persuaded Griffin to advance him the whole of the eight hundred guineas for the *Animated Nature*, though he had only done about a third part of the book. At the instigation of Newbery he had begun a story after the manner of the *Vicar of Wakefield* ; but it appears that such chapters as he had written were not deemed to be promising ; and the undertaking was abandoned. The fact is, Goldsmith was now thinking of another method of replenishing his purse. *The Vicar of Wakefield* had brought him little but reputation ; the *Good-natured Man* had brought him £500. It was to the stage that he now looked for assistance out of the financial slough in which he was plunged. He was engaged in writing a comedy ; and that comedy was *She Stoops to Conquer*.

In the Dedication to Johnson which was prefixed to this play on its appearance in type, Goldsmith hints that the attempt to write a comedy not of the sentimental order then in fashion, was a hazardous thing ; and also that Colman, who saw the piece in its various stages, was of this opinion too. Colman threw cold water on the undertaking from the very beginning. It was only extreme pressure on the part of Goldsmith's friends that induced—or rather compelled—him to accept the comedy ; and that, after he had kept the unfortunate author in the tortures of suspense for month after month. But although Goldsmith knew the danger, he was resolved to face it. He hated the sentimentalists and all their works ; and determined to keep his new comedy faithful to nature, whether people called it low or not. His object was to raise a genuine, hearty laugh ; not to write a piece for school declamation ; and he had enough confidence in himself to do the work in his own way. Moreover he took the earliest possible opportunity, in writing this piece, of poking fun at the sensitive creatures who had been shocked by the “vulgarity” of *The Good-natured Man*. “Bravo!

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\* “God knows I had no thought for or against liberty in my head ; my whole aim being to make up a book of a decent size that, as Squire Richards says, ‘would do no harm to nobody.’ ”—Goldsmith to Langton, September, 1771.



Bravo!" cry the jolly companions of Tony Lumpkin, when that promising buckeen has finished his song at the Three Pigeons; then follows criticism:

"*First Fellow.* The squire has got spunk in him.

"*Second Fel.* I loves to hear him sing, bekeays he never gives us nothing that's low.

"*Third Fel.* O damn anything that's low, I cannot bear it.

"*Fourth Fel.* The genteel thing is the genteel thing any time: if so be that a gentleman bees in a concatenation accordingly.

"*Third Fel.* I likes the maxum of it, Master Muggins. What, though I am obligated to dance a bear, a man may be a gentieman for all that. May this be my poison, if my bear ever dances but to the very genteelest of tunes: 'Water Parted,' or the 'The Minuet in Ariadne.' "

Indeed, Goldsmith, however he might figure in society, was always capable of holding his own when he had his pen in his hand. And even at the outset of this comedy one sees how much he has gained in literary confidence since the writing of the *Good-natured Man*. Here there is no anxious stiffness at all; but a brisk, free conversation, full of point that is not too formal, and yet conveying all the information that has usually to be crammed into a first scene. In taking as the groundwork of his plot that old adventure that had befallen himself—his mistaking a squire's house for an inn—he was hampering himself with something that was not the less improbable because it had actually happened; but we begin to forget all the improbabilities through the naturalness of the people to whom we are introduced, and the brisk movement and life of the piece.

Fashions in dramatic literature may come and go; but the wholesome good-natured fun of *She Stoops to Conquer* is as capable of producing a hearty laugh now as it was when it first saw the light in Covent Garden. Tony Lumpkin is one of the especial favourites of the theatre-going public; and no wonder. With all the young cub's jibes and jeers, his impudence and grimaces, one has a sneaking love for the scapegrace; we laugh with him, rather than at him, how can we fail to enjoy those malevolent tricks of his when he so obviously enjoys them himself? And Diggory—do we not owe an eternal debt of gratitude to honest Diggory for telling us about Ould Grouse in the gunroom, that immortal joke at which thousands and thousands of people have roared with laughter, though they never any one of them could tell what the story was about? The scene in which the old squire lectures his faithful attendants on their manners and duties, is one of the truest bits of comedy on the English stage:

*Mr. Hardcastle.* But you're not to stand so, with your hands in your pockets. Take your hands from your pockets, Roger; and from your head, you blockhead you. See how Diggory carries his hands. They're a little too stiff, indeed, but that's no great matter.

*Diggory.* Ay, mind how I hold them. I learned to hold my hands this way when I was upon drill for the militia. And so being upon drill——

*Hard.* You must not be so talkative, Diggory. You must be all attention to the guests. You must hear us talk, and not think of talking; you must see us drink, and not think of drinking; you must see us eat, and not think of eating.

*Dig.* By the laws, your worship, that's perfectly impossible. Whenever Diggory sees yeating going forward, ecod, he's always \ishing for a mouthful himself.

*Hard.* Blockhead! Is not a bellyful in the kitchen as good as a bellyful in the parlour? Stay your stomach with that reflection.

*Dig.* Ecod, I thank your lordship, I'll make a shift to stay my stomach with a slice of cold beef in the pantry.

*Hard.* Diggory, you are too talkative.—Then, if I happen to say a good thing, or tell a good story at table, you must not all burst out a-laughing, as if you made part of the company.

*Dig.* Then, ecod, your worship must not tell the story of Ould Grouse in the gunroom; I can't help laughing at that—he! he! he!—for the soul of n.e. We have laughed at that these twenty years—ha! ha! ha!

*Hard.* Ha! ha! ha! The story is a good one. Well, honest Diggory, you may laugh at that—but still remember to be attentive. Suppose one of the company should call for a glass of wine, how will you behave! A glass of wine, sir, if you please (*to DIGGORY*).—Eh, why don't you move?

*"Dig.* Ecod, your worship, I never have courage till I see the eatables and drinkables brought upo' the table, and then I'm as bauld as a lion.

*"Hard.* What, will nobody move?

*"First Serv.* I'm not to leave this place.

*"Second Serv.* I'm sure it's no place of mine.

*"Third Serv.* Nor mine, for sartain.

*"Dig.* Wauns, and I'm sure it canna be mine."

No doubt all this is very "low" indeed; and perhaps Mr. Colman may be forgiven for suspecting that the refined wits of the day would be shocked by these rude humours of a parcel of servants. But all that can be said in this direction was said at the time of Horace Walpole, in a letter to a friend of his; and this criticism is so amusing in its pretence and imbecility that it is worth quoting at large. "Dr. Goldsmith has written a comedy," says this profound critic, "—no, it is the lowest of all farces; it is not the subject I condemn, though very vulgar, but the execution. The drift tends to no moral, no edification of any kind—the situations, however, are well imagined, and make one laugh in spite of the grossness of the dialogue, the forced witticisms, and total improbability of the whole plan and conduct. But what disgusts me most is, that though the characters are very low, and aim at low humour, not one of them says a sentence that is natural, or marks any character at all." Horace Walpole sighing for edification—from a Covent Garden comedy! Surely, if the old gods have any laughter left, and if they take any notice of what is done in the literary world here below, there must have rumbled through the courts of Olympus a guffaw of sardonic laughter, when that solemn criticism was put down on paper.

Meanwhile Colman's original fears had developed into a sort of stupid obstinacy. He was so convinced that the play would not succeed, that he would spend no money in putting it on the stage; while far and wide he announced its failure as a foregone conclusion.

Under this gloom of vaticination the rehearsals were nevertheless proceeded with—the brunt of the quarrels among the players falling wholly on Goldsmith, for the manager seems to have withdrawn in despair ; while all the Johnson confraternity were determined to do what they could for Goldsmith on the opening night. That was the 15th of March, 1773. His friends invited the author to dinner as a prelude to the play ; Dr. Johnson was in the chair ; there was plenty of gayety. But this means of keeping up the anxious author's spirits was not very successful. Goldsmith's mouth, we are told by Reynolds, became so parched “from the agitation of his mind, that he was unable to swallow a single mouthful.” Moreover, he could not face the ordeal of sitting through the play ; when his friends left the tavern and betook themselves to the theatre, he went away by himself ; and was subsequently found walking in St. James's Park. The friend who discovered him there persuaded him that his presence in the theatre might be useful in case of an emergency ; and ultimately got him to accompany him to Covent Garden. When Goldsmith reached the theatre, the fifth act had been begun.

Oddly enough, the first thing he heard on entering the stage-door was a hiss. The story goes that the poor author was dreadfully frightened ; and that in answer to a hurried question, Colman exclaimed, “Psha ! Doctor, don't be afraid of a squib, when we have been sitting these two hours on a barrel of gunpowder.” If this was meant as a hoax, it was a cruel one ; if meant seriously, it was untrue. For the piece had turned out a great hit. From beginning to end of the performance the audience were in a roar of laughter ; and the single hiss that Goldsmith unluckily heard was so markedly exceptional, that it became the talk of the town, and was variously attributed to one or other of Goldsmith's rivals. Colman, too, suffered at the hands of the wits for his gloomy and falsified predictions ; and had, indeed, to beg Goldsmith to intercede for him. It is a great pity that Boswell was not in London at this time ; for then we might have had a description of the supper that naturally would follow the play, and of Goldsmith's demeanor under this new success. Besides the gratification, moreover, of his choice of materials being approved by the public, there was the material benefit accruing to him from the three “author's nights.” These are supposed to have produced nearly five hundred pounds—a substantial sum in those days.

Boswell did not come to London till the second of April following ; and the first mention we find of Goldsmith is in connection with an incident which has its ludicrous as well as its regrettable aspect. The further success of *She Stoops to Conquer* was not likely to propitiate the wretched hole-and-corner cutthroats that infested the journalism of that day. More especially was Kenrick driven mad with envy ; and so, in a letter addressed to the *London Packet*, this poor creature determined once more to set aside the judgment of the public, and show



Dr. Goldsmith in his true colours. The letter is a wretched production, full of personalities only fit for an angry washerwoman, and of rancour without point. But there was one passage in it that effectually roused Goldsmith's rage; for here the *Jessamy Bride* was introduced as "the lovely H—k." The letter was anonymous; but the publisher of the print, a man called Evans, was known; and so Goldsmith thought he would go and give Evans a beating. If he had asked Johnson's advice about the matter, he would no doubt have been told to pay no heed at all to anonymous scurrility—certainly not to attempt to reply to it with a cudgel. When Johnson heard that Foote meant to "take him off," he turned to Davies and asked him what was the common price of an oak stick; but an oak stick in Johnson's hands and an oak stick in Goldsmith's hands were two different things. However, to the bookseller's shop the indignant poet proceeded, in company with a friend; got hold of Evans; accused him of having insulted a young lady by putting her name in his paper; and, when the publisher would fain have shifted the responsibility on to the editor, forthwith denounced him as a rascal, and hit him over the back with his cane. The publisher, however, was quite a match for Goldsmith; and there is no saying how the deadly combat might have ended, had not a lamp been broken overhead, the oil of which drenched both the warriors. This intervention of the superior gods was just as successful as a Homeric cloud; the fray ceased; Goldsmith and his friend withdrew; and ultimately an action for assault was compromised by Goldsmith's paying fifty pounds to a charity. Then the howl of the journals arose. Their prerogative had been assailed. "Attacks upon private character were the most liberal existing source of newspaper income," Mr. Forster writes; and so the pack turned with one cry on the unlucky poet. There was nothing of "the Monument" about poor Goldsmith; and at last he was worried into writing a letter of defence addressed to the public. "He has indeed done it very well," said Johnson to Boswell, "but it is a foolish thing well done." And further he remarked, "Why, sir, I believe it is the first time he has *beat*;" he may have *been beaten* before. This, sir, is a new plume to him."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### INCREASING DIFFICULTIES.—THE END.

THE pecuniary success of *She Stoops to Conquer* did but little to relieve Goldsmith from those financial embarrassments which were now weighing heavily on his mind. And now he had less of the old high spirits that had enabled him to laugh off the cares of debt. His

health became disordered; an old disease renewed its attacks, and was grown more violent because of his long-continued sedentary habits. Indeed, from this point to the day of his death—not a long interval, either—we find little but a record of successive endeavours, some of them wild and hopeless enough, to obtain money anyhow. Of course he went to the Club, as usual; and gave dinner-parties; and had a laugh or a song ready for the occasion. It is possible, also, to trace a certain growth of confidence in himself, no doubt the result of the repeated proofs of his genius he had put before his friends. It was something more than mere personal intimacy that justified the rebuke he administered to Reynolds, when the latter painted an allegorical picture representing the triumph of Beattie and Truth over Voltaire and Scepticism. “It very ill becomes a man of your eminence and character,” he said, “to debase so high a genius as Voltaire before so mean a writer as Beattie. Beattie and his book will be forgotten in ten years, while Voltaire’s fame will last forever. Take care it does not perpetuate this picture, to the shame of such a man as you.” He was aware, too, of the position he had won for himself in English literature. He knew that people in after-days would ask about him; and it was with no sort of unwarrantable vain-glory that he gave Percy certain materials for a biography which he wished him to undertake. Hence the *Percy Memoir*.

He was only forty-five when he made this request; and he had not suffered much from illness during his life; so that there was apparently no grounds for imagining that the end was near. But at this time Goldsmith began to suffer severe fits of depression; and he grew irritable and capricious of temper—no doubt another result of failing health. He was embroiled in disputes with the booksellers; and, on one occasion, seems to have been much hurt because Johnson, who had been asked to step in as arbiter, decided against him. He was offended with Johnson on another occasion because of his sending away certain dishes at a dinner given to him by Goldsmith, as a hint that these entertainments were too luxurious for one in Goldsmith’s position. It was probably owing to some temporary feeling of this sort—perhaps to some expression of it on Goldsmith’s part—that Johnson spoke of Goldsmith’s “malice” towards him. Mrs. Thrale had suggested that Goldsmith would be the best person to write Johnson’s biography. “The dog would write it best, to be sure,” said Johnson, “but his particular malice towards me, and general disregard of truth, would make the book useless to all and injurious to my character.” Of course it is always impossible to say what measure of jocular exaggeration there may not be in a chance phrase such as this: of the fact that there was no serious or permanent quarrel between the two friends we have abundant proof in Boswell’s faithful pages.

To return to the various endeavours made by Goldsmith and his

friends to meet the difficulties now closing in around him, we find, first of all, the familiar hack-work. For two volumes of a *History of Greece* he had received from Griffin £250. Then his friends tried to get him a pension from the Government; but this was definitely refused. An expedient of his own seemed to promise well at first. He thought of bringing out a *Popular Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, a series of contributions mostly by his friend, with himself as editor; and among those who offered to assist him were Johnson, Reynolds, Burke, and Dr. Burney. But the booksellers were afraid. The project would involve a large expense; and they had no high opinion of Goldsmith's business habits. Then he offered to alter *The Good-natured Man* for Garrick; but Garrick preferred to treat with him for a new comedy, and generously allowed him to draw on him for the money in advance. This last help enabled him to go to Barton for a brief holiday; but the relief was only temporary. On his return to London even his nearest friends began to observe the change in his manner. In the old days Goldsmith had faced pecuniary difficulties with a light heart; but now, his health broken, and every avenue of escape apparently closed, he was giving way to despair. His friend Cradock, coming up to town, found Goldsmith in a most despondent condition; and also hints that the unhappy author was trying to conceal the true state of affairs. "I believe," says Cradock, "he died miserable, and that his friends were not entirely aware of his distress."

And yet it was during this closing period of anxiety, despondency, and gloomy foreboding that the brilliant and humorous lines of *Retaliation* were written—that last scintillation of the bright and happy genius that was soon to be extinguished forever. The most varied accounts have been given of the origin of this *jeu d'esprit*; and even Garrick's, which was meant to supersede and correct all others, is self-contradictory. For according to this version of the story, which was found among the Garrick papers, and which is printed in Mr. Cunningham's edition of Goldsmith's works, the whole thing arose out of Goldsmith and Garrick resolving one evening at the St. James's Coffee-House to write each other's epitaph. Garrick's well-known couplet was instantly produced:

"Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,  
Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll."

Goldsmith, according to Garrick, either would not or could not retort at the moment; "but went to work, and some weeks after produced the following printed poem, called *Retaliation*." But Garrick himself goes on to say: "The following poems in manuscript were written by several of the gentlemen on purpose to provoke the Doctor to an answer, which came forth at last with great credit to him in *Retaliation*."



The most probable version of the story, which may be pieced together from various sources, is that at the coffee-house named this business of writing comic epitaphs was started some evening or other by the whole company ; that Goldsmith and Garrick pitted themselves against each other ; that thereafter Goldsmith began as occasion served to write similar squibs about his friends, which were shown about as they were written ; that thereupon those gentlemen, not to be behind-hand, composed more elaborate pieces in proof of their wit ; and that, finally, Goldsmith resolved to bind these fugitive lines of his together in a poem, which he left unfinished, and which, under the name of *Retaliation*, was published after his death. This hypothetical account receives some confirmation from the fact that the scheme of the poem and its component parts do not fit together well ; the introduction looks like an afterthought, and has not the freedom and pungency of a piece of improvisation. An imaginary dinner is described, the guests being Garrick, Reynolds, Burke, Cumberland, and the rest of them, Goldsmith last of all. More wine is called for, until the whole of his companions have fallen beneath the table :

“ Then, with chaos and blunders encircling my head,  
Let me ponder, and tell what I think of the *dead*.”

This is a somewhat clumsy excuse for introducing a series of epitaphs ; but the epitaphs amply atone for it. That on Garrick is especially remarkable as a bit of character-sketching ; its shrewd hints—all in perfect courtesy and good-humour—going a little nearer to the truth than is common in epitaphs of any sort :

“ Here lies David Garrick, describe me who can ;  
An abridgment of all that was pleasant in man.  
As an actor, confessed without rival to shine :  
As a wit, if not first, in the very first line :  
Yet, with talents like these, and an excellent heart,  
The man had his failings, a dupe to his art.  
Like an ill-judging beauty, his colours he spread,  
And beplastered with rouge his own natural red.  
On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting ;  
'Twas only that, when he was off, he was acting.  
With no reason on earth to go out of his way,  
He turned and he varied full ten times a day :  
Though secure of our hearts yet confoundedly sick  
If they were not his own by finessing and trick ;  
He cast off his friends as a huntsman his pack,  
For he knew when he pleased he could whistle them back.  
Of praise a mere glutton, he swallowed what came :  
And the puff of a dunce, he mistook it for fame ;  
Till his relish grown callous, almost to disease,  
Who peppered the highest was surest to please.  
But let us be candid, and speak out our mind :  
If dunces applauded, he paid them in kind.  
Ye Kenricks, ye Kellys, and Woodfalls so grave,  
What a commerce was yours, while you got and you gave !

How did Grub Street re-echo the shouts that you raised,  
 While he was be-Rosciused, and you were bepraised.  
 But peace to his spirit, wherever it flies,  
 To act as an angel and mix with the skies :  
 Those poets who owe their best fame to his skill  
 Shall still be his flatterers, go where he will :  
 Old Shakespeare receive him with praise and with love,  
 And Beaumonts and Bens be his Kellys above."

The truth is that Goldsmith, though he was ready to bless his "honest little man" when he received from him sixty pounds in advance for a comedy not begun, never took quite so kindly to Garrick as to some of his other friends. There is no pretence of discrimination at all, for example, in the lines devoted in this poem to Reynolds. All the generous enthusiasm of Goldsmith's Irish nature appears here ; he will admit of no possible rival to this especial friend of his :

"Here Reynolds is laid, and to tell you my mind,  
 He had not left a wiser or better behind."

There is a tradition that the epitaph on Reynolds, ending with the unfinished line

"By flattery unspoiled . . . ."

was Goldsmith's last piece of writing. One would like to believe that, in any case.

Goldsmith had returned to his Edgware lodgings, and had, indeed, formed some notion of selling his chambers in the Temple, and living in the country for at least ten months in the year, when a sudden attack of his old disorder drove him into town again for medical advice. He would appear to have received some relief ; but a nervous fever followed ; and on the night of the 25th March, 1774, when he was but forty-six years of age, he took to his bed for the last time. At first he refused to regard his illness as serious, and insisted on dosing himself with certain fever-powders from which he had received benefit on previous occasions ; but by and by as his strength gave way he submitted to the advice of the physicians who were in attendance on him. Day after day passed, his weakness visibly increasing, though, curiously enough, the symptoms of fever were gradually abating. At length one of the doctors, remarking to him that his pulse was in greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever, asked him if his mind was at ease. "No, it is not," answered Goldsmith ; and these were his last words. Early in the morning of Monday, April 4th, convulsions set in ; these continued for rather more than an hour ; then the troubled brain and the sick heart found rest forever.

When the news was carried to his friends, Burke, it is said, burst into tears, and Reynolds put aside his work for the day. But it does not appear that they had visited him during his illness ; and neither

Johnson, nor Reynolds, nor Burke, nor Garrick followed his body to the grave. It is true, a public funeral was talked of; and, among others, Reynolds, Burke and Garrick were to have carried the pall; but this was abandoned; and Goldsmith was privately buried in the ground of the Temple Church on the 9th of April, 1774. Strangely enough, too, Johnson seems to have omitted all mention of Goldsmith from his letters to Boswell. It was not until Boswell had written to him, on June 24th, "You have said nothing to me about poor Goldsmith," that Johnson, writing on July 4th, answered as follows: "Of poor dear Dr. Goldsmith there is little to be told, more than the papers have made public. He died of a fever, made, I am afraid, more violent by uneasiness of mind. His debts began to be heavy, and all his resources were exhausted. Sir Joshua is of opinion that he owed not less than two thousand pounds. Was ever poet so trusted before?"

But if the greatest grief at the sudden and premature death of Goldsmith would seem to have been shown at the moment by certain wretched creatures who were found weeping on the stairs leading to his chambers, it must not be supposed that his fine friends either forgot him, or ceased to regard his memory with a great gentleness and kindness. Some two years after, when a monument was about to be erected to Goldsmith in Westminster Abbey, Johnson consented to write "the poor dear Doctor's epitaph;" and so anxious were the members of that famous circle in which Goldsmith had figured, that a just tribute should be paid to his genius, that they even ventured to send a round-robin to the great Cham desiring him to amend his first draft. Now, perhaps, we have less interest in Johnson's estimate of Goldsmith's genius—though it contains the famous *Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit*—than in the phrases which tell of the honour paid to the memory of the dead poet by the love of his companions and the faithfulness of his friends. It may here be added that the precise spot where Goldsmith was buried in the Temple church-yard is unknown. So lived and so died Oliver Goldsmith.

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In the foregoing pages the writings of Goldsmith have been given so prominent a place in the history of his life that it is unnecessary to take them here collectively and endeavour to sum up their distinctive qualities. As much as could be said within the limited space has, it is hoped, been said about their genuine and tender pathos, that never at any time verges on the affected or theatrical; about their quaint, delicate, delightful humour; about that broader humour that is not afraid to provoke the wholesome laughter of mankind by dealing with common and familiar ways, and manners and men; about that choiceness of diction, that lightness and grace of touch, that lend a charm even to Goldsmith's ordinary hack-work.



Still less necessary, perhaps, is it to review the facts and circumstances of Goldsmith's life, and to make of them an example, a warning, or an accusation. That has too often been done. His name has been used to glorify a sham Bohemianism—a Bohemianism that finds it easy to live in taverns, but does not find it easy, so far as one sees, to write poems like the *Deserted Village*. His experiences as an author have been brought forward to swell the cry about neglected genius—that is, by writers who assume their genius in order to prove the neglect. The misery that occasionally befell him during his wayward career has been made the basis of an accusation against society, the English constitution, Christianity—Heaven knows what. It is time to have done with all this nonsense. Goldsmith resorted to the hack-work of literature when every thing else had failed him ; and he was fairly paid for it. When he did better work, when he “struck for honest fame,” the nation gave him all the honour that he could have desired. With an assured reputation, and with ample means of subsistence, he obtained entrance into the most distinguished society then in England—he was made the friend of England's greatest in the arts and literature—and could have confined himself to that society exclusively if he had chosen. His temperament, no doubt, exposed him to suffering ; and the exquisite sensitiveness of a man of genius may demand our sympathy ; but in far greater measure is our sympathy demanded for the thousands upon thousands of people who, from illness or nervous excitability, suffer from quite as keen a sensitiveness without the consolation of the fame that genius brings.

In plain truth, Goldsmith himself would have been the last to put forward pleas humiliating alike to himself and to his calling. Instead of beseeching the State to look after authors ; instead of imploring society to grant them “recognition ;” instead of saying of himself “he wrote, and paid the penalty ;” he would frankly have admitted that he chose to live his life his own way, and therefore paid the penalty. This is not written with any desire of upbraiding Goldsmith. He did choose to live his own life his own way, and we now have the splendid and beautiful results of his work ; and the world—looking at these with a constant admiration, and with a great and lenient love for their author—is not anxious to know what he did with his guineas, or whether the milkman was ever paid. “He had raised money and squandered it, by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense. BUT LET NOT HIS FRAILTIES BE REMEMBERED : HE WAS A VERY GREAT MAN.” This is Johnson's wise summing up ; and with it we may here take leave of gentle Goldsmith.

# SIR WALTER SCOTT.

BY

RICHARD H. HUTTON.





## PREFATORY NOTE.

It will be observed that the greater part of this little book has been taken in one form or other from Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, in ten volumes. No introduction to Scott would be worth much in which that course was not followed. Indeed, excepting Sir Walter's own writings, there is hardly any other great source of information about him ; and that is so full, that hardly anything needful to illustrate the subject of Scott's life remains untouched. As regards the only matters of controversy—Scott's relations to the Ballantynes—I have taken care to check Mr. Lockhart's statements by reading those of the representatives of the Ballantyne brothers ; but with this exception, Sir Walter's own works and Lockhart's life of him are the great authorities concerning his character and his story.

Just ten years ago Mr. Gladstone, in expressing to the late Mr. Hope Scott the great delight which the perusal of Lockhart's life of Sir Walter had given him, wrote, " I may be wrong, but I am vaguely under the impression that it has never had a really wide circulation. If so, it is the saddest pity, and I should greatly like (without any censure on its present length) to see published an abbreviation of it." Mr. Gladstone did not then know that as long ago as 1848 Mr. Lockhart did himself prepare such an abbreviation, in which the original eighty-four chapters were compressed into eighteen—though the abbreviation contained additions as well as compressions. But even this abridgment is itself a bulky volume of 800 pages, containing, I should think, considerably more than a third of the reading in the original ten volumes, and is not, therefore, very likely to be preferred to the completer work. In some respects I hope that this introduction may supply, better than that bulky abbreviation, what Mr. Gladstone probably meant to suggest,—some slight miniature taken from the great picture with care enough to tempt on those who look on it to the study of the fuller life, as well as of that image of Sir Walter which is impressed by his own hand upon his works.



# SIR WALTER SCOTT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE, AND CHILDHOOD.

SIR WALTER SCOTT was the first literary man of a great riding, sporting, and fighting clan. Indeed, his father—a Writer to the Signet, or Edinburgh solicitor—was the first of his race to adopt a town life and a sedentary profession. Sir Walter was the lineal descendant—six generations removed—of that Walter Scott commemorated in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, who is known in Border history and legend as Auld Wat of Harden. Auld Wat's son William, captured by Sir Gideon Murray, of Elibank, during a raid of the Scotts on Sir Gideon's lands, was, as tradition says, given his choice between being hanged on Sir Gideon's private gallows, and marrying the ugliest of Sir Gideon's three ugly daughters, Meikle-mouthed Meg, reputed as carrying off the prize of ugliness among the women of four counties. Sir William was a handsome man. He took three days to consider the alternative proposed to him, but chose life with the large-mouthed lady in the end; and found her, according to the tradition which the poet, her descendant, has transmitted, an excellent wife, with a fine talent for pickling the beef which her husband stole from the herds of his foes. Meikle-mouthed Meg transmitted a distinct trace of her large mouth to all her descendants, and not the least to him who was to use his "meikle" mouth to best advantage as the spokesman of his race. Rather more than half-way between Auld Wat of Harden's times—i. e., the middle of the sixteenth century—and those of Sir Walter Scott, poet and novelist, lived Sir Walter's great-grandfather, Walter Scott, generally known in Teviotdale by the surname of Bear-die, because he would never cut his beard after the banishment of the Stuarts, and who took arms in their cause; and lost by his intrigues on their behalf almost all that he had, besides running the greatest risk of being hanged as a traitor. This was the ancestor of whom Sir Walter speaks in the introduction to the last canto of *Marmion* :—



"And thus my Christmas still I hold,  
 Where my great grandsire came of old,  
 With amber beard and flaxen hair,  
 And reverend apostolic air—  
 The feast and holy tide to share,  
 And mix sobriety with wine,  
 And honest mirth with thoughts divine ;  
 Small thought was his in after time  
 E'er to be hitch'd into a rhyme,  
 The simple sire could only boast  
 That he was loyal to his cost ;  
 The banish'd race of kings revered,  
 And lost his land—but kept his beard."

Sir Walter inherited from Beardie that sentimental Stuart bias which his better judgment condemned, but which seemed to be rather part of his blood than of his mind. And most useful to him this sentiment undoubtedly was in helping him to restore the mould and fashion of the past. Beardie's second son was Sir Walter's grandfather, and to him he owed not only his first childish experience of the delights of country life, but also,—in his own estimation at least,—that risky, speculative, and sanguine spirit which had so much influence over his fortunes. The good man of Sandy-Knowe, wishing to breed sheep, and being destitute of capital, borrowed 30*l.* from a shepherd who was willing to invest that sum for him in sheep ; and the two set off to purchase a flock near Wooler, in Northumberland ; but when the shepherd had found what he thought would suit their purpose, he returned to find his master galloping about a fine hunter, on which he had spent the whole capital in hand. *This* speculation, however, prospered. A few days later Robert Scott displayed the qualities of the hunter to such admirable effect with John Scott of Harden's hounds, that he sold the horse for double the money he had given, and, unlike his grandson, abandoned speculative purchases there and then. In the latter days of his clouded fortunes, after Ballantyne's and Constable's failure, Sir Walter was accustomed to point to the picture of his grandfather and say, "Blood will out : my building and planting was but his buying the hunter before he stocked his sheep-walk, over again." But Sir Walter added, says Mr. Lockhart, as he glanced at the likeness of his own staid and prudent father, "Yet it was a wonder, too, for I have a thread of the attorney in me," which was doubtless the case ; nor was that thread the least of his inheritances, for from his father certainly Sir Walter derived that disposition towards conscientious, plodding industry, legalism of mind, methodical habits of work, and a generous, equitable interpretation of the scope of all his obligations to others, which, prized and cultivated by him as they were, turned a great genius, which, especially considering the hare-brained element in him, might easily have been frittered away or devoted to worthless ends, to such fruitful account, and stamped it with so grand an impress of personal magnanimity and

fortitude. Sir Walter's father reminds one in not a few of the formal and rather martinetish traits which are related of him, of the father of Goethe, "a formal man, with strong ideas of strait-laced education, passionately orderly (he thought a good book nothing without a good binding), and never so much excited as by a necessary deviation from the 'pre-established harmony' of household rules." That description would apply almost wholly to the sketch of old Mr. Scott which the novelist has given us under the thin disguise of Alexander Fairford, Writer to the Signet, in *Redgauntlet*, a figure confessedly meant, in its chief features, to represent his father. To this Sir Walter adds, in one of his later journals, the trait that his father was a man of fine presence, who conducted all conventional arrangements with a certain grandeur and dignity of air, and "absolutely loved a funeral." "He seemed to preserve the list of a whole bead-roll of cousins merely for the pleasure of being at their funerals, which he was often asked to superintend, and I suspect had sometimes to pay for. He carried me with him as often as he could to these mortuary ceremonies; but feeling I was not, like him, either useful or ornamental, I escaped as often as I could." This strong dash of the conventional in Scott's father, this satisfaction in seeing people fairly to the door of life, and taking his final leave of them there, with something of a ceremonious flourish of observance, was, however, combined with a much nobler and deeper kind of orderliness. Sir Walter used to say that his father had lost no small part of a very flourishing business, by insisting that his clients should do their duty to their own people better than they were themselves at all inclined to do it. And of this generous strictness in sacrificing his own interests to his sympathy for others, the son had as much as the father.

Sir Walter's mother, who was a Miss Rutherford, the daughter of a physician, had been better educated than most Scotch women of her day, in spite of having been sent "to be finished off" by "the honourable Mrs. Ogilvie," whose training was so effective, in one direction at least, that even in her eightieth year Mrs. Scott could not enjoy a comfortable rest in her chair, but "took as much care to avoid touching her chair with her back, as if she had still been under the stern eyes of Mrs. Ogilvie." None the less Mrs. Scott was a motherly, comfortable woman, with much tenderness of heart, and a well-stored, vivid memory. Sir Walter, writing of her, after his mother's death, to Lady Louisa Stewart, says, "She had a mind peculiarly well stored with much acquired information and natural talent, and as she was very old, and had an excellent memory, she could draw, without the least exaggeration or affectation, the most striking pictures of the past age. If I have been able to do anything in the way of painting the past times, it is very much from the studies with which she presented me. She connected a long period of time with the present generation, for she remembered, and had often spoken with, a person

who perfectly recollected the battle of Dunbar and Oliver Cromwell's subsequent entry into Edinburgh." On the day before the stroke of paralysis which carried her off, she had told Mr. and Mrs. Scott of Harden, "with great accuracy, the real story of the Bride of Lammermuir, and pointed out wherein it differed from the novel. She had all the names of the parties, and pointed out (for she was a great genealogist) their connexion with existing families." \* Sir Walter records many evidences of the tenderness of his mother's nature, and he returned warmly her affection for himself. His executors, in lifting up his desk, the evening after his burial, found "arranged in careful order a series of little objects, which had obviously been so placed there that his eye might rest on them every morning before he began his tasks. These were the old-fashioned boxes that had garnished his mother's toilette, when he, a sickly child, slept in her dressing-room,—the silver taper-stand, which the young advocate had bought for her with his first five guinea fee,—a row of small packets inscribed with her hand, and containing the hair of those of her offspring that had died before her,—his father's snuff-box, and etui-case,—and more things of the like sort." † A story, characteristic of both Sir Walter's parents, is told by Mr. Lockhart, which will serve better than anything I can remember to bring the father and mother of Scott vividly before the imagination. His father, like Mr. Alexander Fairford, in *Redgauntlet*, though himself a strong Hanoverian, inherited enough feeling for the Stuarts from his grandfather Beardie, and sympathized enough with those who were, as he neutrally expressed it, "out in '45," to ignore as much as possible any phrases offensive to the Jacobites. For instance, he always called Charles Edward not *the Pretender* but *the Chevalier*,—and he did business for many Jacobites:—

"Mrs. Scott's curiosity was strongly excited one autumn by the regular appearance at a certain hour every evening of a sedan chair, to deposit a person carefully muffled up in a mantle, who was immediately ushered into her husband's private room, and commonly remained with him there until long after the usual bed-time of this orderly family. Mr. Scott answered her repeated inquiries with a vagueness that irritated the lady's feelings more and more; until at last she could bear the thing no longer; but one evening, just as she heard the bell ring as for the stranger's chair to carry him off, she made her appearance within the forbidden parlour with a salver in her hand, observing that she thought the gentlemen had sat so long they would be better of a dish of tea, and had ventured accordingly to bring some for their acceptance. The stranger, a person of distinguished appearance, and richly dressed, bowed to the lady and accepted a cup; but her husband knit his brows, and refused very coldly to partake the refreshment. A moment afterwards the visitor withdrew, and Mr. Scott, lifting up the window-sash, took the cup, which he had left empty on the table, and tossed it out upon the pavement. The lady exclaimed for her china, but was put to silence by her husband's saying, "I can forgive your little curiosity, madam, but you must pay the penalty. I may admit into my house,

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 172-3. The edition referred to is throughout the edition of 1839 in ten volumes.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 241.



on a piece of business, persons wholly unworthy to be treated as guests by my wife. Ne'ther lip of me nor of mine comes after Mr. Murray of Broughton's.'

"This was the unhappy man who, after attending Prince Charles Stuart as his secretary throughout the greater part of his expedition, condescended to redeem his own life and fortune by bearing evidence against the noblest of his late adherents, when—

"Pitied by gentle hearts, Kilmarnock died,  
The brave, Balmerino were on thy side."\*

"Broughton's saucer"—i. e. the saucer belonging to the cup thus sacrificed by Mr. Scott to his indignation against one who had redeemed his own life and fortune by turning king's evidence against one of Prince Charles Stuart's adherents,—was carefully preserved by his son, and hung up in his first study, or "den," under a little print of Prince Charlie. This anecdote brings before the mind very vividly the character of Sir Walter's parents. The eager curiosity of the active-minded woman, whom "the honourable Mrs. Ogilvie" had been able to keep upright in her chair for life, but not to cure of the desire to unravel the little mysteries of which she had a passing glimpse; the grave formality of the husband, fretting under his wife's personal attention to a dishonoured man, and making her pay the penalty by dashing to pieces the cup which the king's evidence had used,—again, the visitor himself, perfectly conscious no doubt that the Hanoverian lawyer held him in utter scorn for his faithlessness and cowardice, and reluctant, nevertheless, to reject the courtesy of the wife, though he could not get anything but cold legal advice from the husband:—all these are figures which must have acted on the youthful imagination of the poet with singular vivacity, and shaped themselves in a hundred changing turns of the historical kaleidoscope which was always before his mind's eye, as he mused upon that past which he was to restore for us with almost more than its original freshness of life. With such scenes touching even his own home, Scott must have been constantly taught to balance in his own mind, the more romantic, against the more sober and rational considerations, which had so recently divided house against house, even in the same family and clan. That the stern Calvinistic lawyer should have retained so much of his grandfather Beardie's respect for the adherents of the exiled house of Stuart, must in itself have struck the boy as even more remarkable than the passionate loyalty of the Stuarts' professed partisans, and have lent a new sanction to the romantic drift of his mother's old traditions, and one to which they must have been indebted for a great part of their fascination.

Walter Scott, the ninth of twelve children, of whom the first six died in early childhood, was born in Edinburgh, on the 15th of August, 1771. Of the six later-born children, all but one were boys,

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 243-4.

and the one sister was a somewhat querulous invalid, whom he seems to have pitied almost more than he loved. At the age of eighteen months the boy had a teething-fever, ending in a life-long lameness; and this was the reason why the child was sent to reside with his grandfather—the speculative grandfather, who had doubled his capital by buying a racehorse instead of sheep—at Sandy-Knowe, near the ruined tower of Smailholm, celebrated afterwards in his ballad of *The Eve of St. John*, in the neighbourhood of some fine crags. To these crags the housemaid sent from Edinburgh to look after him, used to carry him up, with a design (which she confessed to the housekeeper)—due, of course, to incipient insanity—of murdering the child there, and burying him in the moss. Of course the maid was dismissed. After this the child used to be sent out, when the weather was fine, in the safer charge of the shepherd, who would often lay him beside the sheep. Long afterwards Scott told Mr. Skene, during an excursion with Turner, the great painter, who was drawing his illustration of Smailholm tower for one of Scott's works, that "the habit of lying on the turf there among the sheep and the lambs had given his mind a peculiar tenderness for these animals, which it had ever since retained." Being forgotten one day upon the knolls when a thunderstorm came on, his aunt ran out to bring him in, and found him shouting, "Bonny! bonny!" at every flash of lightning. One of the old servants at Sandy-Knowe spoke of the child long afterwards as "a sweet-tempered bairn, a darling with all about the house," and certainly the miniature taken of him in his seventh year confirms the impression thus given. It is sweet-tempered above everything, and only the long upper lip and large mouth, derived from his ancestress, Meg Murray, convey the promise of the power which was in him. Of course the high, almost conical forehead, which gained him in his later days from his comrades at the bar the name of "Old Peveril," in allusion to "the peak" which they saw towering high above the heads of other men as he approached, is not so much marked beneath the childish locks of this miniature as it was in later life; and the massive, and, in repose, certainly heavy face of his maturity, which conveyed the impression of the great bulk of his character, is still quite invisible under the sunny ripple of childish earnestness and gaiety. Scott's hair in childhood was light chestnut, which turned to nut brown in youth. His eyebrows were bushy, for we find mention made of them as a "pent-house." His eyes were always light blue. They had in them a capacity, on the one hand, for enthusiasm, sunny brightness, and even hare-brained humour, and on the other for expressing determined resolve and kindly irony, which gave great range of expression to the face. There are plenty of materials for judging what sort of a boy Scott was. In spite of his lameness, he early taught himself to clamber about with an agility that few children could have sur-

passed, and to sit his first pony—a little Shetland, not bigger than a large Newfoundland dog, which used to come into the house to be fed by him—even in gallops on very rough ground. He became very early a declaimer. Having learned the ballad of Hardy Knute, he shouted it forth with such pertinacious enthusiasm that the clergyman of his grandfather's parish complained that he "might as well speak in a cannon's mouth as where that child was." At six years of age Mrs. Cockburn described him as the most astounding genius of a boy she ever saw. "He was reading a poem to his mother when I went in. I made him read on: it was the description of a shipwreck. His passion rose with the storm. 'There's the mast gone,' says he; 'crash it goes; they will all perish.' After his agitation he turns to me, 'That is too melancholy,' says he; 'I had better read you something more amusing.'" And after the call, he told his aunt he liked Mrs. Cockburn, for "she was a *virtuoso* like himself." "Dear Walter," says Aunt Jenny, "what is a *virtuoso*?" "Don't ye know? Why, its one who wishes and will know everything." This last scene took place in his father's house in Edinburgh; but Scott's life at Sandy-Knowe, including even the old minister, Dr. Duncan, who so bitterly complained of the boy's ballad-spouting, is painted for us, as everybody knows, in the picture of his infancy given in the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion* :—

"It was a barren scene and wild,  
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled :  
But ever and anon between  
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green ;  
And well the lonely infant knew  
Recesses where the wall flower grew,  
And honeysuckle loved to crawl  
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.  
I deem'd such nooks the sweetest shade  
The sun in all its round survey'd ;  
And still I thought that shatter'd tower  
The mightiest work of human power ;  
And marvell'd as the aged hind  
With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,  
Of forayers, who, with headlong force,  
Down from that strength had spur'd their horse,  
Their southern rapine to renew,  
Far in the distant Cheviots blue,  
And, home returning, fill'd the hall  
With revel, wassail rout, and brawl.  
Methought that still with trump and clang  
The gateway's broken arches rang ;  
Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,  
Glared through the window's rusty bars ;  
And ever, by the winter hearth,  
Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,  
Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,  
Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms,  
Of patriot battles, won of old  
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold ;



Of later fields of feud and fight  
 When, pouring from their Highland height,  
 The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,  
 Had swept the scarlet ranks away.  
 While, stretch'd at length upon the floor,  
 Again I fought each combat o'er,  
 Pebbles and shells in order laid.  
 The mimic ranks of war display'd ;  
 And onward still the Scottish lion bore,  
 And still the scatter'd Southron fled before.  
 Still, with vain fondness, could I trace  
 Anew each kind familiar face  
 That brighten'd at our evening fire !  
 From the thatch'd mansion's grey-hair'd sire,  
 Wise without learning, plain and good,  
 And sprung of Scotland's gentler blood ;  
 Whose eye in age, quick, clear, and keen,  
 Show'd what in youth its glance had been ;  
 Whose doom discording neighbours sought,  
 Content with equity unbought ;  
 To him the venerable priest,  
 Our frequent and familiar guest,  
 Whose life and manners well could paint  
 Alike the student and the saint ;  
 Alas ! whose speech too oft I broke  
 With gambol rude and timeless joke ;  
 For I was wayward, bold, and wild.  
 A self-willed imp, a grandame's child ;  
 But, half a plague and half a jest,  
 Was still endured, beloved, caress'd."

A picture this of a child of great spirit, though with that spirit was combined an active and subduing sweetness which could often conquer, as by a sudden spell, those whom the boy loved. Towards those, however, whom he did not love he could be vindictive. His relative, the laird of Raeburn, on one occasion wrung the neck of a pet starling, which the child had partly tamed. "I flew at his throat like a wild-cat," he said, in recalling the circumstance, fifty years later, in his journal on occasion of the old laird's death ; "and was torn from him with no little difficulty." And, judging from this journal, I doubt whether he had ever really forgiven the laird of Raeburn. Towards those whom he loved but had offended, his manner was very different. "I seldom," said one of his tutors, Mr. Mitchell, "had occasion all the time I was in the family to find fault with him, even for trifles, and only once to threaten serious castigation, of which he was no sooner aware, than he suddenly sprang up, threw his arms about my neck and kissed me." And the quaint old gentleman adds this commentary :—"By such generous and noble conduct my displeasure was in a moment converted into esteem and admiration ; my soul melted into tenderness, and I was ready to mingle my tears with his." The spontaneous and fascinating sweetness of his childhood was naturally overshadowed to some extent in later life by Scott's masculine and proud character, but it was always

in him. And there was much of true character in the child behind this sweetness. He had wonderful self-command, and a peremptory kind of good sense, even in his infancy. While yet a child under six years of age, hearing one of the servants beginning to tell a ghost-story to another, and well knowing that if he listened it would scare away his night's rest, he acted for himself with all the promptness of an elder person acting for him, and, in spite of the fascination of the subject, resolutely muffled his head in the bed-clothes and refused to hear the tale. His sagacity in judging of the character of others was shown, too, even as a school-boy; and once it led him to take an advantage which caused him many compunctions in after-life, whenever he recalled his skilful puerile tactics. On one occasion—I tell the story as he himself rehearsed it to Samuel Rogers, almost at the end of his life, after his attack of apoplexy, and just before leaving England for Italy in the hopeless quest of health—he had long desired to get above a school-fellow in his class, who defied all his efforts, till Scott noticed that whenever a question was asked of his rival, the lad's fingers grasped a particular button on his waistcoat, while his mind went in search of the answer. Scott accordingly anticipated that if he could remove this button, the boy would be thrown out, and so it proved. The button was cut off, and the next time the lad was questioned, his fingers being unable to find the button, and his eyes going in perplexed search after his fingers, he stood confounded, and Scott mastered by strategy the place which he could not gain by mere industry. "Often in after-life," said Scott, in narrating the manœuvre to Rogers, "has the sight of him smote me as I passed by him; and often have I resolved to make him some reparation, but it ended in good resolutions. Though I never renewed my acquaintance with him, I often saw him, for he filled some inferior office in one of the courts of law at Edinburgh. Poor fellow! I believe he is dead; he took early to drinking."\*

Scott's school reputation was one of irregular ability; he "glanced like a meteor from one end of the class to the other," and received more praise for his interpretation of the spirit of his authors than for his knowledge of their language. Out of school his fame stood higher. He extemporized innumerable stories to which his school-fellows delighted to listen; and, in spite of his lameness, he was always in the thick of the "bickers," or street fights with the boys of the town, and renowned for his boldness in climbing the "kittle nine stanes" which are "projected high in air from the precipitous black granite of the Castle-rock." At home he was much bullied by his elder brother Robert, a lively lad, not without some powers of verse-making, who went into the navy, then in an unlucky moment passed into the merchant service of the East India Company, and so

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\*Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 128.

lost the chance of distinguishing himself in the great naval campaigns of Nelson. Perhaps Scott would have been all the better for a sister a little closer to him than Anne—sickly and fanciful—appears ever to have been. The masculine side of life appears to predominate a little too much in his school and college days, and he had such vast energy, vitality, and pride, that his life at this time would have borne a little taming under the influence of a sister thoroughly congenial to him. In relation to his studies he was wilful, though not perhaps perverse. He steadily declined, for instance, to learn Greek, though he mastered Latin pretty fairly. After a time spent at the High School, Edinburgh, Scott was sent to a school at Kelso, where his master made a friend and companion of him, and so poured into him a certain amount of Latin scholarship which he would never otherwise have obtained. I need hardly add that as a boy Scott was, so far as a boy could be, a Tory—a worshipper of the past, and a great Conservative of any remnant of the past which reformers wished to get rid of. In the autobiographical fragment of 1808, he says, in relation to these school-days, “I, with my head on fire for chivalry, was a Cavalier; my friend was a Roundhead; I was a Tory, and he was a Whig; I hated Presbyterians, and admired Montrose with his victorious Highlanders; he liked the Presbyterian Ulysses, the deep and politic Argyle; so that we never wanted subjects of dispute, but our disputes were always amicable.” And he adds candidly enough: “In all these tenets there was no real conviction on my part, arising out of acquaintance with the views or principles of either party. . . . I took up politics at that period, as King Charles II. did his religion, from an idea that the Cavalier creed was the more gentlemanlike persuasion of the two.” And the uniformly amicable character of these controversies between the young people, itself shows how much more they were controversies of the imagination than of faith. I doubt whether Scott’s *convictions* on the issues of the Past were ever very much more decided than they were during his boyhood; though undoubtedly he learned to understand much more profoundly what was really held by the ablest men on both sides of these disputed issues. The result, however, was, I think, that while he entered better and better into both sides as life went on, he never adopted either with any earnestness of conviction, being content to admit, even to himself, that while his feelings leaned in one direction, his reason pointed decidedly in the other; and holding that it was hardly needful to identify himself positively with either. As regarded the present, however, feeling always carried the day. Scott was a Tory all his life.



## CHAPTER II.

## YOUTH—CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.

AS SCOTT grew up, entered the classes of the college, and began his legal studies, first as apprentice to his father, and then in the law classes of the University, he became noticeable to all his friends for his gigantic memory,—the rich stores of romantic material with which it was loaded,—his giant feats of industry for any cherished purpose,—his delight in adventure and in all athletic enterprises,—his great enjoyment of youthful “rows,” so long as they did not divide the knot of friends to which he belonged, and his skill in peacemaking amongst his own set. During his apprenticeship his only means of increasing his slender allowance with funds which he could devote to his favourite studies, was to earn money by copying, and he tells us himself that he remembered writing “120 folio pages with no interval either for food or rest,” fourteen or fifteen hours’ very hard work at the very least,—expressly for this purpose.

In the second year of Scott’s apprenticeship, at about the age of sixteen, he had an attack of hæmorrhage, no recurrence of which took place for some forty years, but which was then the beginning of the end. During this illness silence was absolutely imposed upon him,—two old ladies putting their fingers on their lips whenever he offered to speak. It was at this time that the lad began his study of the scenic side of history, and especially of campaigns, which he illustrated for himself by the arrangement of shells, seeds, and pebbles, so as to represent encountering armies, in the manner referred to (and referred to apparently in anticipation of a later stage of his life than that he was then speaking of) in the passage from the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion* which I have already given. He also managed so to arrange the looking glasses in his room as to see the troops march out to exercise in the meadows, as he lay in bed. His reading was almost all in the direction of military exploit, or romance and mediæval legend and the later border songs of his own country. He learned Italian and read Ariosto. Later he learned Spanish and devoured Cervantes, whose “*novelas*,” he said, “first inspired him with the ambition to excel in fiction:” and all that he read and admired he remembered. Scott used to illustrate the capricious affinity of his own memory for what suited it, and its complete rejection of what did not, by old Beattie of Meikledale’s answer to a Scotch divine, who complimented him on the strength of his memory. “No, sir,” said the old Borderer, “I have no command of my memory. It only retains what hits my fancy; and probably, sir, if you were to preach to me for two hours, I would not be able, when you finished, to remember a word you had been saying.” Such a memory, when

it belongs to a man of genius, is really a sieve of the most valuable kind. It sifts away what is foreign and alien to his genius, and assimilates what is suited to it. In his very last days, when he was visiting Italy for the first time, Scott delighted in Malta, for it recalled to him Vertot's *Knights of Malta*, and much other mediæval story which he had pored over in his youth. But when his friends descanted to him at Pozzuoli on the *Thermæ*—commonly called the Temple of Serapis—among the ruins of which he stood, he only remarked that he would believe whatever he was told, “for many of his friends, and particularly Mr. Morritt, had frequently tried to drive classical antiquities, as they are called, into his head, but they had always found his skull too thick.” Was it not perhaps some deep literary instinct, like that here indicated, which made him, as a lad, refuse so steadily to learn Greek, and try to prove to his indignant professor that Ariosto was superior to Homer? Scott afterwards deeply regretted this neglect of Greek; but I cannot help thinking that his regret was misplaced. Greek literature would have brought before his mind standards of poetry and art which could not but have both deeply impressed and greatly daunted an intellect of so much power; I say both impressed and daunted, because I believe that Scott himself would never have succeeded in studies of a classical kind, while he might—like Goethe perhaps—have been either misled, by admiration for that school, into attempting what was not adapted to his genius, or else disheartened in the work for which his character and ancestry really fitted him. It has been said that there is a real affinity between Scott and Homer. cf. Doyle But the long and reflowing music of Homer, once naturalized into his mind, would have discontented him with that quick, sharp, metrical tramp of his own moss-troopers, to which alone his genius as a poet was perfectly suited.

It might be supposed that with these romantic tastes, Scott could scarcely have made much of a lawyer, though the inference would, I believe, be quite mistaken. His father, however, reproached him with being better fitted for a pedler than a lawyer,—so persistently did he trudge over all the neighbouring counties in search of the beauties of nature and the historic associations of battle, siege, or legend. On one occasion when, with their last penny spent, Scott and one of his companions had returned to Edinburgh, living during their last day on drinks of milk offered by generous peasant-women, and the hips and haws on the hedges, he remarked to his father how much he had wished for George Primrose's power of playing on the flute in order to earn a meal by the way, old Mr. Scott, catching grumpily at the idea, replied, “I greatly doubt, sir, you were born for nae better than a gangrel scrape-gut,”—a speech which very probably suggested his son's conception of Darsie Latimer's adventures with the blind fiddler, “Wandering Willie,” in *Redgauntlet*. And it is true that these were the days of mental and moral fermentation, what was called in Germany

the Sturm-und-Drang, the "fret-and-fury" period of Scott's life, so far as one so mellow and genial in temper ever passed through a period of fret and fury at all. In other words these were the days of rapid motion, of walks of thirty miles a day which the lame lad yet found no fatigue to him; of mad enterprises, scrapes and drinking-bouts, in one of which Scott was half persuaded by his friends that he actually sang a song for the only time in his life. But even in these days of youthful sociability, with companions of his own age, Scott was always himself, and his imperious will often asserted itself. Writing of this time, some thirty-five years or so later, he said, "When I was a boy, and on foot expeditions, as we had many, no creature could be indifferent which way our course was directed, and I acquiesced in what any one proposed; but if I was once driven to make a choice, and felt piqued in honour to maintain my proposition, I have broken off from the whole party, rather than yield to any one. No doubt, too, in that day of what he himself described as "that silly smart fancies that ran in my brain like the bubbles in a glass of champagne, as brilliant to my thinking, as intoxicating, as evanescent," solitude was no real deprivation to him; and one can easily imagine him marching off on his solitary way after a dispute with his companions, reciting to himself old songs or ballads, with that "noticeable but altogether indescribable play of the upper lip," which Mr. Lockhart thinks suggested to one of Scott's most intimate friends, on his first acquaintance with him, the grotesque notion that he had been "a hautboy-player." This was the first impression formed of Scott by William Clerk, one of his earliest and life-long friends. It greatly amused Scott, who not only had never played on any instrument in his life, but could hardly make shift to join in the chorus of a popular song without marring its effect; but perhaps the impression suggested was not so very far astray after all. Looking to the poetic side of his character, the trumpet certainly would have been the instrument that would have best symbolized the spirit both of Scott's thought and of his verses. Mr. Lockhart himself, in summing up his impressions of Sir Walter, quotes as the most expressive of his lines:

"Sound, sound the clarion! fill the fife!  
To all the sensual world proclaim,  
One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth a world without a name."

And undoubtedly this gives us the key-note of Scott's personal life as well as of his poetic power. Above everything he was high-spirited, a man of noble, and, at the same time, of martial feelings. Sir Francis Doyle speaks very justly of Sir Walter as "among English singers the undoubted inheritor of that trumpet-note, which, under the breath of Homer, has made the wrath of Achilles immortal," and I do not doubt that there was something in Scott's face, and especially



in the expression of his mouth, to suggest this even to his early college companions. Unfortunately, however, even "one crowded hour of glorious life" may sometimes have a "sensual" inspiration, and in the days of youthful adventure, too many such hours seem to have owed their inspiration to the Scottish peasant's chief bane, the Highland whisky. In his eager search after the old ballads of the Border, Scott had many a blithe adventure, which ended only too often in a carouse. It was soon after this time that he first began those raids into Liddesdale, of which all the world has enjoyed the records in the sketches—embodied subsequently in *Guy Mannering*—of Dandie Dinmont, his pony Dumble, and the various Peppers and Mustards from whose breed there were afterwards introduced into Scott's own family, generations of terriers, always named, as Sir Walter expressed it, after "the cruet." I must quote the now classic record of those youthful escapades :

"Eh me," said Mr. Shortreed, his companion in all these Liddesdale raids, "sic an endless fund of humour and drollery as he had then wi' him. Never ten yards but we were either laughing or roaring and singing. Wherever we stopped, how brawlie he suited himsel' to everybody ! He aye did as the lave did ; never made himsel' the great man or took ony airs in the company. I've seen him in a' moods in these jaunts, grave and gay, daft and serious, sober and drunk—(this, however, even in our wildest rambles, was but rare)—but drunk or sober he was aye the gentleman. He looked excessively heavy and stupid when he was *fou*, but he was never out o' gude humour."

One of the stories of that time will illustrate better the wilder days of Scott's youth than any comment :—

"On reaching one evening," says Mr. Lockhart, "some Charlieshope or other (I forget the name) among those wildernesses, they found a kindly reception as usual, but to their agreeable surprise, after some days of hard living, a measured and orderly hospitality as respected liquor. Soon after supper, at which a bottle of elderberry wine alone had been produced, a young student of divinity who happened to be in the house was called upon to take the 'big ha' Bible,' in the good old fashion of Burns' Saturday Night ; and some progress had been already made in the service, when the good man of the farm, whose 'tendency,' as Mr. Mitchell says, 'was soporific,' scandalized his wife and the dominie by startl'ng suddenly from his knees and rubbing his eyes, with a stentorian exclamation of 'By — I here's the keg at last !' and in tumbled, as he spake the word, a couple of sturdy herdsman, whom, on hearing, a day before, of the advocate's approaching visit, he had despatched to a certain smuggler's haunt at some considerable distance in quest of a supply of some *run* brandy from the Solway frith. The pious 'exercise' of the house was hopelessly interrupted. With a thousand apologies for his hitherto shabby entertainment, this jolly Elliot or Armstrong had the welcome *keg* mounted on the table without a moment's delay, and gentle and simple, not forgetting the dominie, continued carousing about it until daylight streamed in upon the party. Sir Walter Scott seldom failed, when I saw him in company with his Liddesdale companions, to mimic with infinite humour the sudden outburst of his old host on hearing the clatter of horses' feet, which he knew to indicate the arrival of the keg, the consternation of the dame, and the rueful despair with which the young clergyman closed the book." \*

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 263-71.

No wonder old Mr. Scott felt some doubt of his son's success at the bar, and thought him more fitted in many respects for a "gangrel scrape-gut."\*

In spite of all this love of excitement, Scott became a sound lawyer, and might have been a great lawyer, had not his pride of character, the impatience of his genius, and the stir of his imagination rendered him indisposed to wait and slave in the precise manner which the prepossessions of solicitors appoint.

For Scott's passion for romantic literature was not at all the sort of thing which we ordinarily mean by boys' or girls' love of romance. No amount of drudgery or labour deterred Scott from any undertaking on the prosecution of which he was bent. He was quite the reverse, indeed, of what is usually meant by sentimental, either in his manners or his literary interests. As regards the history of his own country he was no mean antiquarian. Indeed he cared for the mustiest antiquarian researches—of the mediæval kind—so much, that in the depth of his troubles he speaks of a talk with a Scotch antiquary and herald as one of the things which soothed him most. "I do not know anything which relieves the mind so much from the sullens as trifling discussions about antiquarian *old womanries*. It is like knitting a stocking, diverting the mind without occupying it."† Thus his love of romantic literature was as far as possible from that of a mind which only feeds on romantic excitements; rather was it that of one who was so moulded by the transmitted and acquired love of feudal institutions with all their incidents, that he could not take any deep interest in any other fashion of human society. Now the Scotch law was full of vestiges and records of that period,—was indeed a great standing monument of it; and in numbers of his writings Scott shows with how deep an interest he had studied the Scotch law from this point of view. He remarks somewhere that it was natural for a Scotchman to feel a strong attachment to the principle of rank, if only on the ground that almost any Scotchman might, under the Scotch law, turn out to be heir-in-tail to some great Scotch title or estate by the death of intervening relations. And the law which sometimes caused such sudden transformations, had subsequently a true interest for him of course as a novel writer, to say nothing of his interest in it as an antiquarian and historian who loved to repeople the earth, not merely with the picturesque groups of the soldiers and courts of the past, but with the actors in all the various quaint and homely transactions and puzzlements which the feudal ages had brought forth. Hence though, as a matter of fact, Scott never made much figure as an advocate, he became a very respectable, and might unquestionably have become a very great, lawyer. When he started at the bar, however, he had

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 296.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 221.

not acquired the tact to impress an ordinary assembly. In one case which he conducted before the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, when defending a parish minister threatened with deposition for drunkenness and unseemly behaviour, he certainly missed the proper tone,—first receiving a censure for the freedom of his manner in treating the allegations against his client, and then so far collapsing under the rebuke of the Moderator, as to lose the force and urgency necessary to produce an effect on his audience. But these were merely a boy's mishaps. He was certainly by no means a Heaven-born orator, and therefore could not expect to spring into exceptionally *early* distinction, and the only true reason for his relative failure was that he was so full of literary power, and so proudly impatient of the fetters which prudence seemed to impose on his extra-professional proceedings, that he never gained the credit he deserved for the general common sense, the unwearied industry, and the keen appreciation of the ins and outs of legal method, which might have raised him to the highest reputation even as a judge.

All readers of his novels know how Scott delights in the humours of the law. By way of illustration take the following passage, which is both short and amusing, in which Saunders Fairford—the old solicitor painted from Scott's father in *Redgauntlet*—descants on the law of the stirrup cup. "It was decided in a case before the town bailies of Cupar Angus, when Luckie Simpson's cow had drunk up Luckie Jamieson's browst of ale, while it stood in the door to cool, that there was no damage to pay, because the crummie drank without sitting down; such being the circumstances constituting a Doch an Dorroch, which is a standing drink for which no reckoning is paid." I do not believe that any one of Scott's contemporaries had greater legal ability than he, though, as it happened, they were never fairly tried. But he had both the pride and impatience of genius. It fretted him to feel that he was dependent on the good opinions of solicitors, and that they who were incapable of understanding his genius thought the less instead of the better of him as an advocate, for every indication he gave of that genius. Even on the day of his call to the bar he gave expression to a sort of humorous foretaste of this impatience, saying to William Clerk, who had been called with him, as he mimicked the air and tone of a Highland lass waiting at the Cross of Edinburgh waiting to be hired for the harvest, "We've stood here an hour by the Tron, hinny, and deil a ane has speered our price." Scott continued to practice at the bar—nominally at least—for fourteen years, but the most which he ever seems to have made in any one year was short of 230*l.*, and latterly his practice was much diminishing instead of increasing. His own impatience of solicitors' patronage was against him; his well-known dabbings in poetry were still more against him; and his general repute for wild and unprofessional adventurousness—which was much greater than he de-



served—was probably most of all against him. Before he had been six years at the bar he joined the organization of the Edinburgh Volunteer Cavalry, took a very active part in the drill, and was made their Quartermaster. Then he visited London, and became largely known for his ballads and his love of ballads. In his eighth year at the bar he accepted a small permanent appointment, with 300*l.* a year, as sheriff of Selkirkshire; and this occurring soon after his marriage to a lady of some means, no doubt diminished still further his professional zeal. For one-third of the time during which Scott practised as an advocate he made no pretense of taking interest in that part of his work, though he was always deeply interested in the law itself. In 1806 he undertook gratuitously the duties of a Clerk of Session—a permanent officer of the Court at Edinburgh—and discharged them without remuneration for five years, from 1806 to 1811, in order to secure his ultimate succession to the office in the place of an invalid, who for that period received all the emoluments and did none of the work. Nevertheless Scott's legal abilities were so well known, that it was certainly at one time intended to offer him a Barony of the Exchequer, and it was his own doing apparently, that it was not offered. The life of literature and the life of the Bar hardly ever suit, and in Scott's case they suited the less, that he felt himself likely to be a dictator in one field, and only a postulant in the other. Literature was a far greater gainer by his choice, than Law could have been a loser. For his capacity for the law he shared with thousands of able men, his capacity for literature with few or none.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

ONE Sunday, about two years before his call to the bar, Scott offered his umbrella to a young lady of much beauty who was coming out of the Greyfriars Church during a shower; the umbrella was graciously accepted; and it was not an unprecedented consequence that Scott fell in love with the borrower, who turned out to be Margaret, daughter of Sir John and Lady Jane Stuart Belches, of Invermay. For near six years after this, Scott indulged the hope of marrying this lady, and it does not seem doubtful that the lady was in part responsible for this impression. Scott's father, who thought his son's prospects very inferior to those of Miss Stuart Belches, felt it his duty to warn the baronet of his son's views, a warning which the old gentleman appears to have received with that grand unconcern characteristic of elderly persons in high position, as a hint intrinsically incredible, or at least unworthy of notice. But he took no alarm, and

Scott's attentions to Margaret Stuart Belches continued till close on the eve of her marriage, in 1796, to William Forbes (afterwards Sir William Forbes), of Pitsligo, a banker, who proved to be one of Sir Walter's most generous and most delicate-minded friends, when his time of troubles came towards the end of both their lives. Whether Scott was in part mistaken as to the impression he had made on the young lady, or she was mistaken as to the impression he had made on herself, or whether other circumstances intervened to cause misunderstanding, or the grand indifference of Sir John gave way to active intervention when the question became a practical one, the world will now never know, but it does not seem very likely that a man of so much force as Scott, who certainly had at one time assured himself at least of the young lady's strong regard, should have been easily displaced even by a rival of ability and of most generous and amiable character. An entry in the diary which Scott kept in 1827, after Constable's and Ballantyne's failure, and his wife's death, seems to me to suggest that there may have been some misunderstanding between the young people, though I am not sure that the inference is justified. The passage completes the story of this passion—Scott's first and only deep passion—so far as it can ever be known to us; and as it is a very pathetic and characteristic entry, and the attachment to which it refers had a great influence on Scott's life, both in keeping him free from some of the most dangerous temptations of the young, during his youth, and in creating within him an interior world of dreams and recollections throughout his whole life, on which his imaginative nature was continually fed—I may as well give it. "He had taken," says Mr. Lockhart, "for that winter [1827], the house No. 6 Shandwick Place, which he occupied by the month during the remainder of his servitude as a clerk of session. Very near this house, he was told a few days after he took possession, dwelt the aged mother of his first love; and he expressed to his friend, Mrs. Skene, a wish that she should carry him to renew an acquaintance which seems to have been interrupted from the period of his youthful romance. Mrs. Skene complied with his desire, and she tells me that a very painful scene ensued." His diary says,—“November 7th. Began to settle myself this morning after the hurry of mind and even of body which I have lately undergone. I went to make a visit and fairly softened myself, like an old fool, with recalling old stories till I was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work. The very grave gives up its dead, and time rolls back thirty years to add to my perplexities. I don't care. I begin to grow case-hardened and like a stag turning at bay, my naturally good temper grows fierce and dangerous. Yet what a romance to tell—and told I fear it will one day be. And then my three years of dreaming and my two years of wakening will be chronicled, doubtless. But the dead will feel no

pain.—November 10th. At twelve o'clock I went again to poor Lady Jane to talk over old stories. I am not clear that it is a right or healthful indulgence to be ripping up old sores, but it seems to give her deep-rooted sorrow words, and that is a mental blood-letting. To me these things are now matter of calm and solemn recollection, never to be forgotten, yet scarce to be remembered with pain.\* It was in 1797, after the break-up of his hopes in relation to this attachment, that Scott wrote the lines *To a Violet*, which Mr. F. T. Palgrave, in his thoughtful and striking introduction to Scott's poems, rightly characterizes as one of the most beautiful of those poems. It is, however, far from one characteristic of Scott, indeed, so different in style from the best of his other poems, that Mr. Browning might well have said of Scott, as he once affirmed of himself, that for the purpose of one particular poem, he "who blows through bronze," had "breathed through silver,"—had "curbed the liberal hand subservient proudly,"—and tamed his spirit to a key elsewhere unknown.

"The violet in her greenwood bower,  
Where birchen boughs with hazels mingle,  
May boast itself the fairest flower  
In glen, or copse, or forest dingle.

"Though fair her gems of azure hue,  
Beneath the dewdrop's weight reclining,  
I've seen an eye of lovelier blue,  
More sweet through watery lustre shining.

"The summer sun that dew shall dry.  
Ere yet the day be past its morrow ;  
Nor longer in my false love's eye  
Remain'd the tear of parting sorrow."

These lines obviously betray a feeling of resentment, which may or may not have been justified ; but they are perhaps the most delicate produced by his pen. The pride which was always so notable a feature in Scott, probably sustained him through the keen, inward pain which it is very certain from a great many of his own words that he must have suffered in this uprooting of his most passionate hopes. And it was in part probably the same pride which led him to form, within the year, a new tie—his engagement to Mademoiselle Charpentier, or Miss Carpenter as she was usually called,—the daughter of a French royalist of Lyons who had died early in the revolution. She had come after her father's death to England, chiefly, it seems, because in the Marquis of Downshire, who was an old friend of the family, her mother knew that she should find a protector for her children. Miss Carpenter was a lively beauty, probably of no great

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 183-4.



depth of character. The few letters given of hers in Mr. Lockhart's life of Scott, give the impression of an amiable, petted girl, of somewhat thin and *espiègle* character, who was rather charmed at the depth and intensity of Scott's nature, and at the expectations which he seemed to form of what love should mean, than capable of realizing them. Evidently she had no inconsiderable pleasure in display; but she made on the whole a very good wife, only one to be protected by him from every care, and not one to share Scott's deeper anxieties, or to participate in his dreams. Yet Mrs. Scott was not devoid of spirits and self-control. For instance, when Mr. Jeffrey, having reviewed *Marmion* in the *Edinburgh* in that depreciating and omniscient tone which was then considered the evidence of critical acumen, dined with Scott on the very day on which the review had appeared, Mrs. Scott behaved to him through the whole evening with the greatest politeness, but fired this parting shot in her broken English, as he took his leave,—“Well, good night, Mr. Jeffrey,—dey tell me you have abused Scott in de *Review*, and I hope Mr. Constable has paid you very well for writing it.” It is hinted that Mrs. Scott was, at the time of Scott's greatest fame, far more exhilarated by it than her husband with his strong sense and sure self-measurement ever was. Mr. Lockhart records that Mrs. Grant of Laggan once said of them, “Mr. Scott always seems to me like a glass, through which the rays of admiration pass without sensibly affecting it; but the bit of paper that lies beside it will presently be in a blaze, and no wonder.” The bit of paper, however, never was in a blaze that I know of; and possibly Mrs. Grant's remark may have had a little feminine spite in it. At all events, it was not till the rays of misfortune, instead of admiration, fell upon Scott's life, that the delicate tissue paper shrivelled up; nor does it seem that, even then, it was the trouble, so much as a serious malady that had fixed on Lady Scott before Sir Walter's troubles began, which really scorched up her life. That she did not feel with the depth and intensity of her husband, or in the same key of feeling, is clear. After the failure, and during the preparations for abandoning the house in Edinburgh, Scott records in his diary:—“It is with a sense of pain that I leave behind a parcel of trumpery prints and little ornaments, once the pride of Lady Scott's heart, but which she saw consigned with indifference to the chance of an auction. Things that have had their day of importance, with me, I cannot forget, though the merest trifles; but I am glad that she, with bad health, and enough to vex her, has not the same useless mode of associating recollections with this unpleasant business.”\*

Poor Lady Scott! It was rather like a bird of paradise mating with an eagle. Yet the result was happy on the whole; for she had a

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 273.

thoroughly kindly nature, and a true heart. Within ten days before her death, Scott enters in his diary:—"Still welcoming me with a smile, and asserting she is better." She was not the ideal wife for Scott; but she loved him, sunned herself in his prosperity, and tried to bear his adversity cheerfully. In her last illness she would always reproach her husband and children for their melancholy faces, even when that melancholy was, as she well knew, due to the approaching shadow of her own death.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### EARLIEST POETRY AND BORDER MINSTRELSY.

SCOTT's first serious attempt in poetry was a version of Bürger's *Lenore*, a spectre-ballad of the violent kind, much in favour in Germany at a somewhat earlier period, but certainly not a specimen of the higher order of imaginative genius. However, it stirred Scott's youthful blood, and made him "wish to heaven he could get a skull and two cross-bones!" a modest desire, to be expressed with so much fervour, and one almost immediately gratified. Probably no one ever gave a more spirited version of Bürger's ballad than Scott has given; but the use to which Miss Cranstoun, a friend and confidante of his love for Miss Stuart Belches, strove to turn it, by getting it printed, blazoned, and richly bound, and presenting it to the young lady as a proof of her admirer's abilities, was perhaps hardly very sagacious. It is quite possible, at least, that Miss Stuart Belches may have regarded this vehement admirer of spectral wedding journeys and skeleton bridals, as unlikely to prepare for her that comfortable, trim, and decorous future which young ladies usually desire. At any rate, the bold stroke failed. The young lady admired the verses, but, as we have seen, declined the translator. Perhaps she regarded banking as safer, if less brilliant, work than the most effective description of skeleton riders. Indeed, Scott at this time—to those who did not know what was in him, which no one, not even excepting himself, did—had no very sure prospects of comfort, to say nothing of wealth. It is curious, too, that his first adventure in literature was thus connected with his interest in the preternatural, for no man ever lived whose genius was sounder or healthier, and less disposed to dwell on the half-and-half lights of a dim and eerie world; yet ghostly subjects always interested him deeply, and he often touched them in his stories, more, I think, from the strong artistic contrast they afforded to his favourite conceptions of life, than from any other motive. There never was, I fancy, an organization less susceptible of this order

of fears and superstitions than his own. When a friend jokingly urged him, within a few months of his death, not to leave Rome on a Friday, as it was a day of bad omen for a journey, he replied, laughing, "Superstition is very picturesque, and I make it, at times, stand me in great stead, but I never allow it to interfere with interest or convenience." Basil Hall reports Scott's having told him on the last evening of the year 1824, when they were talking over this subject, that "having once arrived at a country inn, he was told there was no bed for him. 'No place to lie down at all?' said he. 'No,' said the people of the house; 'none, except a room in which there is a corpse lying.' 'Well,' said he, 'did the person die of any contagious disorder?' 'Oh, no; not at all,' said they. 'Well, then,' continued he, 'let me have the other bed. So,' said Sir Walter, 'I laid me down, and never had a better night's sleep in my life.' " He was, indeed, a man of iron nerve, whose truest artistic enjoyment was in noting the forms of character seen in full daylight by the light of the most ordinary experience. Perhaps for that reason he can on occasion relate a preternatural incident, such as the appearance of old Alice at the fountain, at the very moment of her death, to the Master of Ravenswood, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, with great effect. It was probably the vivacity with which he realized the violence which such incidents do to the terrestrial common sense of our ordinary nature, and at the same time, the sedulous accuracy of detail with which he narrated them, rather than any, even the smallest, special susceptibility of his own brain to thrills of preternatural kind, which gave him rather a unique pleasure in dealing with such preternatural elements. Sometimes, however, his ghosts are a little too muscular to produce their due effect as ghosts. In translating Bürger's ballad his great success lay in the vividness of the spectre's horsemanship. For instance,—

"Tramp ! tramp ! along the land they rode,  
 Splash ! splash ! along the sea ;  
 The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,  
 The flashing pebbles flee,"

is far better than any ghostly touch in it ; so, too, every one will remember how spirited a rider is the white Lady of Avenel, in *The Monastery*, and how vigorously she takes fords,—as vigorously as the sheriff himself, who was very fond of fords. On the whole, Scott was too sunny and healthily-minded for a ghost-seer ; and the skull and cross-bones with which he ornamented his "den" in his father's house, did not succeed in tempting him into the world of twilight and cobwebs wherein he made his first literary excursion. His *William and Helen*, the name he gave to his translation of Bürger's *Lenore*, made in 1795, was effective, after all, more for its rapid movement, than for the weirdness of its effects.



If, however, it was the raw preternaturalism of such ballads as Bürger's which first led Scott to test his own powers, his genius soon turned to more appropriate and natural subjects. Ever since his earliest college days he had been collecting, in those excursions of his into Liddesdale and elsewhere, materials for a book on *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*; and the publication of this work, in January, 1802, (in two volumes at first), was his first great literary success. The whole edition of eight hundred copies was sold within the year, while the skill and care which Scott had devoted to the historical illustration of the ballads, and the force and spirit of his own new ballads, written in imitation of the old, gained him at once a very high literary name. And the name was well deserved. The *Border Minstrelsy* was more commensurate in range with the genius of Scott, than even the romantic poems by which it was soon followed, and which were received with such universal and almost unparalleled delight. For Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* gives more than a glimpse of all his many great powers—his historical industry and knowledge, his masculine humour, his delight in restoring the vision of the "old, simple, violent world" of rugged activity and excitement, as well as that power to kindle men's hearts, as by a trumpet-call, which was the chief secret of the charm of his own greatest poems. It is much easier to discern the great novelist of subsequent years in the *Border Minstrelsy* than even in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake* taken together. From those romantic poems you would never guess that Scott entered more eagerly and heartily into the common incidents and common cares of every-day human life than into the most romantic fortunes; from them you would never know how completely he had mastered the leading features of quite different periods of our history; from them you would never infer that you had before you one of the best plodders, as well as one of the most enthusiastic dreamers, in British literature. But all this might have been gathered from the various introductions and notes to the *Border Minstrelsy*, which are full of skilful illustrations, of comments teeming with humour, and of historic weight. The general introduction gives us a general survey of the graphic pictures of Border quarrels, their simple violence and simple cunning. It enters, for instance, with grave humour into the strong distinction taken in the debatable land between a "freebooter" and a "thief," and the difficulty which the inland counties had in grasping it, and paints for us, with great vivacity, the various Border superstitions. Another commentary on a very amusing ballad, commemorating the manner in which a blind harper stole a horse and got paid for a mare he had not lost, gives an account of the curious tenure of land, called that of the "king's rent-allers," or "kindly tenants;" and a third describes, in language as vivid as the historical romance of *Kenilworth*, written years after, the manner in which Queen Elizabeth received the news of a check to her policy, and vented her spleen on the King of Scotland.

So much as to the breadth of the literary area which this first book of Scott's covered. As regards the poetic power which his own new ballads, in imitation of the old ones, evinced, I cannot say that those of the first issue of the *Border Minstrelsy* indicated anything like the force which might have been expected from one who was so soon to be the author of *Marmion*, though many of Scott's warmest admirers, including Sir Francis Doyle, seem to place *Glenfinlas* among his finest productions. But in the third volume of the *Border Minstrelsy*, which did not appear till 1803, is contained a ballad on the assassination of the Regent Murray, the story being told by his assassin, which seems to me a specimen of his very highest poetical powers. In *Cadyow Castle* you have not only that rousing trumpet-note which you hear in *Marmion*, but the pomp and glitter of a grand martial scene is painted with all Scott's peculiar terseness and vigour. The opening is singularly happy in preparing the reader for the description of a violent deed. The Earl of Arran, chief of the clan of Hamiltons, is chasing among the old oaks of Cadyow Castle,—oaks which belonged to the ancient Caledonian forest,—the fierce, wild bulls, milk-white, with black muzzles, which were not extirpated till shortly before Scott's own birth :—

“Through the huge oaks of Evandale,  
Whose limbs a thousand years have worn,  
What sullen roar comes down the gale,  
And drowns the hunter's pealing horn ?

“Mightiest of all the beasts of chase  
That roam in woody Caledon,  
Crashing the forest in his race,  
The mountain bull comes thundering on.

“Fierce on the hunter's quiver'd band  
He rolls his eyes of swarthy glow,  
Spurns, with black hoof and horn, the sand,  
And tosses high his mane of snow.

“Aim'd well, the chieftain's lance has flown ;  
Struggling in blood the savage lies ;  
His roar is sunk in hollow groan,—  
Sound, merry huntsman ! sound the pryse ! ”

It is while the hunters are resting after this feat, that Bothwell-haugh dashes among them headlong, spurring his jaded steed with poniard instead of spur :—

“From gory selle and reeling steed,  
Sprang the fierce horseman with a bound,  
And reeking from the recent deed,  
He dash'd his carbine on the ground.”

And then Bothwell-haugh tells his tale of blood, describing the procession from which he had singled out his prey :—

“ ‘Dark Morton, girt with many a spear,  
Murder’s foul minion, led the van ;  
And clash’d their broadswords in the rear  
The wild Macfarlanes’ plaided clan.

“ ‘Glencairn and stout Parkhead were nigh,  
Obsequious at their Regent’s rein,  
And haggard Lindsay’s iron eye,  
That saw fair Mary weep in vain.

“ ‘Mid pennon’d spears, a steely grove,  
Proud Murray’s plumage floated high ;  
Scarce could his trampling charger move,  
So close the minions crowded nigh.

“ ‘From the raised vizor’s shade, his eye,  
Dark rolling, glanced the ranks along,  
And his steel truncheon waved on high,  
Seem’d marshalling the iron throng.

“ ‘But yet his sadden’d brow confess’d  
A passing shade of doubt and awe :  
Some fiend was whispering in his breast,  
“Beware of injured Bothwellhaugh !”

“ ‘The death-shot parts,—the charger springs,—  
Wild rises tumult’s startling roar !  
And Murray’s plumed helmet rings—  
Rings on the ground to rise no more.”

This was the ballad which made so strong an impression on Thomas Campbell, the poet. Referring to some of the lines I have quoted, Campbell said,—“ I have repeated them so often on the North Bridge that the whole fraternity of coachmen know me by tongue as I pass. To be sure, to a mind in sober, serious, street-walking humour, it must bear an appearance of lunacy when one stamps with the hurried pace and fervent shake of the head which strong, pithy poetry excites.”\* I suppose anecdotes of this kind have been oftener told of Scott than of any other English poet. Indeed, Sir Walter, who understood himself well, gives the explanation in one of his diaries :—“ I am sensible,” he says, “ that if there be anything good about my poetry or prose either, it is a hurried frankness of composition, which pleases soldiers, sailors, and young people of bold and active dispositions.”† He might have included old people too. I have heard of two old men—complete strangers—passing each other on a dark London night, when one of them happened to be repeating to himself, just as Campbell did to the hackney coachmen of the North Bridge of Edinburgh, the last lines of the account of Flodden Field in *Marmion*, “ Charge Chester, charge,” when suddenly a cry came out of the darkness, “ On,

\* Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, ii. 79.

† Lockhart’s *Life of Christ*, viii. 370.



Stanley, on," whereupon they finished the death of Marmion between them, took off their hats to each other, and parted, laughing. Scott's is almost the only poetry in the English language that not only runs thus in the head of average men, but heats the head in which it runs by the mere force of its hurried frankness of style, to use Scott's own terms, or by that of its strong and pithy eloquence, as Campbell phrased it. And in *Cadyow Castle* this style is at its culminating point.

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## CHAPTER V.

### SCOTT'S MATURER POEMS.

SCOTT'S genius flowered late. *Cadyow Castle*, the first of his poems, I think, that has indisputable genius plainly stamped on its terse and fiery lines, was composed in 1802, when he was already thirty-one years of age. It was in the same year that he wrote the first canto of his first great romance in verse, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a poem which did not appear till 1805, when he was thirty-four. The first canto (not including the framework, of which the aged harper is the principal figure) was written in the lodgings to which he was confined for a fortnight in 1802, by a kick received from a horse on Portobello sands, during a charge of the Volunteer Cavalry in which Scott was cornet. The poem was originally intended to be included in the *Border Minstrelsy*, as one of the studies in the antique style, but soon outgrew the limits of such a study both in length and in the freedom of its manner. Both the poorest and the best parts of *The Lay* were in a special manner due to Lady Dalkeith (afterwards Duchess of Buccleugh), who suggested it, and in whose honour the poem was written. It was she who requested Scott to write a poem on the legend of the goblin page, Gilbert Horner, and this Scott attempted,—and, so far as the goblin himself was concerned, conspicuously failed. He himself clearly saw that the story of this unmanageable imp was both confused and uninteresting, and that in fact he had to extricate himself from the original groundwork of the tale, as from a regular literary scrape, in the best way he could. In a letter to Miss Seward, Scott says,—“At length the story appeared so uncouth that I was fain to put it into the mouth of my old minstrel, lest the nature of it should be misunderstood, and I should be suspected of setting up a new school of poetry, instead of a feeble attempt to imitate the old. In the process of the romance, the page, intended to be a principal person in the work, contrived (from the baseness of his natural propensities, I suppose,) to slink down stairs into the kitchen, and now

he must e'en abide there."\* And I venture to say that no reader of the poem ever distinctly understood what the goblin page did or did not do, what it was that was "lost" throughout the poem, and "found" at the conclusion, what was the object of his personating the young heir of the house of Scott, and whether or not that object was answered:—what use, if any, the magic book of Michael Scott was to the Lady of Branksome, or whether it was only harm to her; and I doubt moreover whether any one ever cared an iota what answer, or whether any answer, might be given to any of these questions. All this, as Scott himself clearly perceived, was left confused, and not simply vague. The goblin imp had been more certainly an imp of mischief to him than even to his boyish ancestor. But if Lady Dalkeith suggested the poorest part of the poem, she certainly inspired its best part. Scott says, as we have seen, that he brought in the aged harper to save himself from the imputation of "setting up a new school of poetry" instead of humbly imitating an old school. But I think that the chivalrous wish to do honour to Lady Dalkeith, both as a personal friend and as the wife of his "chief,"—as he always called the head of the house of Scott,—had more to do with the introduction of the aged harper, than the wish to guard himself against the imputation of attempting a new poetic style. He clearly intended the Duchess of *The Lay* to represent the Countess for whom he wrote it, and the aged harper, with his reverence and gratitude and self-distrust, was only the disguise in which he felt that he could best pour out his loyalty, and the romantic devotion with which both Lord and Lady Dalkeith, but especially the latter, had inspired him. It was certainly this beautiful framework which assured the immediate success and permanent charm of the poem; and the immediate success was for that day something marvellous. The magnificent quarto edition of 750 copies was soon exhausted, and an octavo edition of 1500 copies was sold out within the year. In the following year two editions, containing together 4250 copies, were disposed of, and before twenty-five years had elapsed, that is, before 1830, 44,000 copies of the poem had been bought by the public in this country, taking account of the legitimate trade alone. Scott gained in all by *The Lay* 769*l.*, an unprecedented sum in those times for an author to obtain from any poem. Little more than half a century before, Johnson received but fifteen guineas for his stately poem on *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, and but ten guineas for his *London*. I do not say that Scott's poem had not much more in it of true poetic fire, though Scott himself, I believe, preferred these poems of Johnson's to anything that he himself ever wrote. But the disproportion in the reward was certainly enormous, and yet what Scott gained by his *Lay* was of course much

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 217.

less than he gained by any of his subsequent poems of equal, or anything like equal, length. Thus for *Marmion* he received 1000 guineas long before the poem was published, and for *one-half* of the copy-right of *The Lord of the Isles* Constable paid Scott 1500 guineas. If we ask ourselves to what this vast popularity of Scott's poems, and especially of the earlier of them (for, as often happens, he was better remunerated for his later and much inferior poems than for his earlier and more brilliant productions) is due, I think the answer must be for the most part, the high romantic glow and extraordinary romantic simplicity of the poetical elements they contained. Take the old harper of *The Lay*, a figure which arrested the attention of Pitt during even that last most anxious year of his anxious life, the year of Ulm and Austerlitz. The lines in which Scott describes the old man's embarrassment when first urged to play, produced on Pitt, according to his own account, "an effect which I might have expected in painting, but could never have fancied capable of being given in poetry." \*

Every one knows the lines to which Pitt refers :—

"The humble boon was soon obtain'd ;  
 The aged minstrel audience gain'd.  
 But, when he reach'd the room of state,  
 Where she with all her ladies sate,  
 Perchance he wish'd his boon denied ;  
 For, when to tune the harp he tried,  
 His trembling hand had lost the ease  
 Which marks security to please ;  
 And scenes long past, of joy and pain,  
 Came wildering o'er his aged brain,—  
 He tried to tune his harp in vain !  
 The pitying Duchess praised its chime,  
 And gave him heart, and gave him time,  
 Till every string's according glee  
 Was blended into harmony.  
 And then, he said, he would full fain  
 He could recall an ancient strain  
 He never thought to sing again.  
 It was not framed for village churls,  
 But for high dames and mighty earls ;  
 He'd play'd it to King Charles the Good,  
 When he kept Court at Holyrood ;  
 And much he wish'd, yet fear'd, to try  
 The long-forgotten melody.  
 Amid the string's his fingers stray'd  
 And an uncertain warbling made,  
 And oft he shook his hoary head,  
 But when he caught the measure wild  
 The old man raised his face, and smiled ;  
 And lighten'd up his faded eye,  
 With all a poet's ecstasy !  
 In varying cadence, soft or strong,  
 He swept the sounding chords along ;

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 226.



The present scene, the future lot,  
 His toils, his wants, were all forgot ;  
 Cold diffidence and age's frost  
 In the full tide of song were lost ;  
 Each blank in faithless memory void  
 The poet's glowing thought supplied ;  
 And, while his harp responsive rung,  
 'Twas thus the latest minstrel sung.

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Here paused the harp : and with its swell  
 The master's fire and courage fell ;  
 Dejectedly and low he bow'd,  
 And, gazing timid on the crowd,  
 He seem'd to seek in every eye  
 If they approved his minstrelsy ;  
 And, diffident of present praise,  
 Somewhat he spoke of former days,  
 And how old age, and wandering long,  
 Had done his hand and harp some wrong."

These lines hardly illustrate, I think, the particular form of Mr. Pitt's criticism, for a quick succession of fine shades of feeling of this kind could never have been delineated in a painting, or indeed in a series of paintings, at all, while they *are* so given in the poem. But the praise itself, if not its exact form, is amply deserved. The singular depth of the romantic glow in this passage, and its equally singular simplicity,—a simplicity which makes it intelligible to every one,—are conspicuous to every reader. It is not what is called classical poetry, for there is no severe outline,—no sculptured completeness and repose,—no satisfying wholeness of effect to the eye of the mind,—no embodiment of a great action. The poet gives us a breath, a ripple of alternating fear and hope in the heart of an old man, and that is all. He catches an emotion that had its roots deep in the past, and that is striving onward towards something in the future ;—he traces the wistfulness and self-distrust with which age seeks to recover the feelings of youth,—the delight with which it greets them when they come,—the hesitation and diffidence with which it recalls them as they pass away, and questions the triumph it has just won,—and he paints all this without subtlety, without complexity, but with a swiftness such as few poets ever surpassed. Generally, however, Scott prefers action itself for his subject, to any feeling, however active in its bent. The cases in which he makes a study of any mood of feeling, as he does of this harper's feeling, are comparatively rare. Deloraine's night-ride to Melrose is a good deal more in Scott's ordinary way, than this study of the old harper's wistful mood. But whatever his subject, his treatment of it is the same. His lines are always strongly drawn ; his handling is always simple ; and his subject always romantic. But though romantic, it is simple almost to bareness,—one of the great causes both of his popularity and of that deficiency in his poetry of which so many of his admirers become

conscious when they compare him with other and richer poets. Scott used to say that in poetry Byron "bet" him; and no doubt that in which chiefly as a poet he "bet" him, was in the variety, the richness, the lustre of his effects. A certain ruggedness and bareness was of the essence of Scott's idealism and romance. It was so in relation to scenery. He told Washington Irving that he loved the very nakedness of the Border country. "It has something," he said, "bold and stern and solitary about it. When I have been for some time in the rich scenery about Edinburgh, which is like ornamented garden-land, I begin to wish myself back again among my honest grey hills, and if I did not see the heather at least once a year, *I think I should die.*" \* Now, the bareness which Scott so loved in his native scenery, there is in all his romantic elements of feeling. It is while he is bold and stern, that he is at his highest ideal point. Directly he begins to attempt rich or pretty subjects, as in parts of *The Lady of the Lake*, and a good deal of *The Lord of the Isles*, and still more in *The Bridal of Triermain*, his charm disappears. It is in painting those moods and exploits, in relation to which Scott shares most completely the feelings of ordinary men, but experiences them with far greater strength and purity than ordinary men, that he triumphs as a poet. Mr. Lockhart tells us that some of Scott's senses were decidedly "blunt," and one seems to recognize this in the simplicity of his romantic effects. "It is a fact," he says, "which some philosophers may think worth setting down, that Scott's organization, as to more than one of the senses, was the reverse of exquisite. He had very little of what musicians call an ear; his smell was hardly more delicate. I have seen him stare about, quite unconscious of the cause, when his whole company betrayed their uneasiness at the approach of an overkept haunch of venison; and neither by the nose nor the palate could he distinguish corked wine from sound. He could never tell Madeira from sherry,—nay, an Oriental friend having sent him a butt of *sheeraz*, when he remembered the circumstance some time afterwards and called for a bottle to have Sir John Malcolm's opinion of its quality, it turned out that his butler, mistaking the label, had already served up half the bin as *sherry*. Port he considered as physick, . . . in truth he liked no wines except sparkling champagne and claret; but even as to the last he was no connoisseur, and sincerely preferred a tumbler of whisky-toddy to the most precious 'liquid-ruby' that ever flowed in the cup of a prince." †

However, Scott's eyes were very keen:—"It was commonly him," as his little son once said, "*that saw the hare sitting.*" And his perception of colour was very delicate as well as his mere sight. As Mr. Ruskin has pointed out, his landscape painting is almost all done by

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 248.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 338.

the lucid use of colour. Nevertheless this bluntness of organization in relation to the less important senses, no doubt contributed something to the singleness and simplicity of the deeper and more vital of Scott's romantic impressions; at least there is good reason to suppose that delicate and complicated susceptibilities do at least diminish the chance of living a strong and concentrated life—do risk the frittering away of feeling on the mere backwaters of sensations, even if they do not directly tend towards artificial and indirect forms of character. Scott's romance is like his native scenery,—bold, bare and rugged, with a swift deep stream of strong pure feeling running through it. There is plenty of colour in his pictures, as there is on the Scotch hills when the heather is out. And so too there is plenty of intensity in his romantic situations; but it is the intensity of simple, natural, unsophisticated, hardy, and manly characters. But as for subtleties and fine shades of feeling in his poems, or anything like the manifold harmonies of the richer arts, they are not to be found, or if such complicated shading is to be found—and it is perhaps attempted in some faint measure in *The Bridal of Triermain*, the poem in which Scott tried to pass himself off for Erskine,—it is only at the expense of the higher qualities of his romantic poetry, that even in this small measure it is supplied. Again, there is no rich music in his verse. It is its rapid onset, its hurrying strength, which so fixes it in the mind.

It was not till 1808, three years after the publication of *The Lay*, that *Marmion*, Scott's greatest poem, was published. But I may as well say what seems necessary of that and his other poems, while I am on the subject of his poetry. *Marmion* has all the advantage over *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* that a coherent story told with force and fulness, and concerned with the same class of subjects as *The Lay*, must have over a confused and ill-managed legend, the only original purpose of which was to serve as the opportunity for a picture of Border life and strife. Scott's poems have sometimes been depreciated as mere *novelettes* in verse, and I think that some of them may be more or less liable to this criticism. For instance, *The Lady of the Lake*, with the exception of two or three brilliant passages, has always seemed to me more of a versified *novelette*,—without the higher and broader characteristics of Scott's prose novels—than of a poem. I suppose what one expects from a poem as distinguished from a romance—even though the poem incorporates a story—is that it should not rest for its chief interest on the mere development of the story; but rather that the narrative should be quite subordinate to that insight into the deeper side of life and manners, in expressing which poetry has so great an advantage over prose. Of *The Lay* and *Marmion* this is true; less true of *The Lady of the Lake*, and still less of *Rokeby*, or *The Lord of the Isles*, and this is why *The Lay* and *Marmion* seem so much superior as poems to the others. They lean



less on the interest of mere incident, more on that of romantic feeling and the great social and historic features of the day. *Marmion* was composed in great part in the saddle, and the stir of a charge of cavalry seems to be at the very core of it. "For myself," said Scott, writing to a lady correspondent at a time when he was in active service as a volunteer, "I must own that to one who has, like myself, *la tête un peu exaltée*, the pomp and circumstance of war gives, for a time, a very poignant and pleasing sensation."\* And you feel this all through *Marmion* even more than in *The Lay*. Mr. Darwin would probably say that Auld Wat of Harden had about as much responsibility for *Marmion* as Sir Walter himself. "You will expect," he wrote to the same lady, who was personally unknown to him at that time, "to see a person who had dedicated himself to literary pursuits, and you will find me a rattle-skulled, half-lawyer, half-sportsman, through whose head a regiment of horse has been exercising since he was five years old."† And what Scott himself felt in relation to the martial elements of his poetry, soldiers in the field felt with equal force. "In the course of the day when *The Lady of the Lake* first reached Sir Adam Fergusson, he was posted with his company on a point of ground exposed to the enemy's artillery, somewhere no doubt on the lines of Torres Vedras. The men were ordered to lie prostrate on the ground; while they kept that attitude, the captain, kneeling at the head, read aloud the description of the battle in Canto VI., and the listening soldiers only interrupted him by a joyous huzza when the French shot struck the bank close above them."‡ It is not often that martial poetry has been put to such a test; but we can well understand with what rapture a Scotch force lying on the ground to shelter from the French fire, would enter into such passages as the following:—

" Their light-arm'd archers far and near  
 Survey'd the tangled ground,  
 Their centre ranks, with pike and spear,  
 A twilight forest frown'd,  
 Their barbed horsemen, in the rear,  
 The stern battalia crown'd.  
 No cymbal clash'd, no clarion rang,  
 Still were the pipe and drum;  
 Save heavy tread, and armour's clang,  
 The sullen march was dumb.  
 There breathed no wind their crests to shake,  
 Or wave their flags abroad;  
 Scarce the frail aspen seem'd to quake,  
 That shadow'd o'er their road.  
 Their vanward scouts no tidings bring,  
 Can rouse no lurking foe,

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 137.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 253.

‡ Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 327.

Nor spy a trace of living thing  
 Save when they stirred the roe ;  
 The host moves like a deep-sea wave,  
 Where rise no rocks its power to brave,  
 High-swelling, dark, and slow ;  
 The lake is passed, and now they gain  
 A narrow and a broken plain,  
 Before the Trosach's rugged jaws,  
 And here the horse and spearmen pause,  
 While, to explore the dangerous glen,  
 Dive through the pass the archer-men.

“ At once there rose so wild a yell  
 Within that dark and narrow dell,  
 As all the fiends from heaven that fell  
 Had pealed the banner-cry of Heil !  
 Forth from the pass, in tumult driven,  
 Like chaff before the wind of heaven,  
 The archery appear ;  
 For life ! for life ! their plight they ply,  
 And shriek, and shout, and battle-cry,  
 And plaid and bonnets waving high,  
 And broadswords flashing to the sky,  
 Are maddening in the rear.  
 Onward they drive, in dreadful race,  
 Pursuers and pursued ;  
 Before that tide of flight and chase,  
 How shall it keep its rooted place,  
 The spearmen's twilight wood ?  
 Down, down, cried Mar, ‘ your lances down ;  
 Bear back both friend and foe !’  
 Like reeds before the tempest's frown,  
 That serried grove of lances brown  
 At once lay level'd low :  
 And, closely shouldering side to side,  
 The bristling ranks the onset bide.—  
 ‘ We'll quell the savage mountaineer,  
 As their Tinchel cows the game !  
 They came as fleet as forest deer,  
 We'll drive them back as tame.’ ”

But admirable in its stern and deep excitement as that is, the battle of Flodden in *Marmion* passes it in vigour, and constitutes perhaps the most perfect description of war by one who was—almost—both poet and warrior, which the English language contains.

And *Marmion* registers the high-water mark of Scott's poetical power, not only in relation to the painting of war, but in relation to the painting of nature. Critics from the beginning onwards have complained of the six introductory epistles, as breaking the unity of the story. But I cannot see that the remark has weight. No poem is written for those who read it as they do a novel—merely to follow the interest of the story ; or if any poem be written for such readers, it deserves to die. On such a principle—which treats a poem as a mere novel and nothing else,—you might object to Homer that he interrupts the battle so often to dwell on the origin of the heroes who are waging it ; or to

Byron that he deserts Childe Harold to meditate on the rapture of solitude. To my mind the ease and frankness of these confessions of the author's recollections give a picture of his life and character while writing *Marmion*, which adds greatly to its attraction as a poem. You have a picture at once not only of the scenery, but of the mind in which that scenery is mirrored, and are brought back frankly, at fit intervals, from the one to the other, in the mode best adapted to help you to appreciate the relation of the poet to the poem. At least if Milton's various interruptions of a much more ambitious theme, to muse upon his own qualifications or disqualifications for the task he had attempted, be not artistic mistakes—and I never heard of any one who thought them so—I cannot see any reason why Scott's periodic recurrence to his own personal history should be artistic mistakes either. If Scott's reverie was less lofty than Milton's, so also was his story. It seems to me as fitting to describe the relation between the poet and his theme in the one case as in the other. What can be more truly a part of *Marmion*, as a poem, though not as a story, than that introduction to the first canto in which Scott expresses his passionate sympathy with the high national feeling of the moment, in his tribute to Pitt and Fox, and then reproaches himself for attempting so great a subject and returns to what he calls his "rude legend," the very essence of which was, however, a passionate appeal to the spirit of national independence? What can be more germane to the poem than the delineation of the strength the poet had derived from musing in the bare and rugged solitude of St. Mary's Lake, in the introduction to the second canto? Or than the striking autobiographical study of his own infancy which I have before extracted from the introduction to the third? It seems to me that *Marmion* without these introductions would be like the hills which border Yarrow, without the stream and lake in which they are reflected.

Never at all events in any later poem was Scott's touch as a mere painter so terse and strong. What a picture of a Scotch winter is given in these few lines :—

"The sheep before the pinching heaven  
To shelter'd dale and down are driven,  
Where yet some faded herbage pines,  
And yet a watery sunbeam shines :  
In meek despondency they eye  
The wither'd sward and wintry sky,  
And from beneath their summer hill  
Stray sadly by Glenkinnon's rill."

Again, if Scott is ever Homeric (which I cannot think he often is, in spite of Sir Francis Doyle's able criticism,—he is too short, too sharp, and too eagerly bent on his rugged way, for a poet who is always delighted to find loopholes, even in battle, from which to look out upon



the great story of human nature), he is certainly nearest to it in such a passage as this :—

“ The Isles-men carried at their backs  
The ancient Danish battle-axe.  
They raised a wild and wondering cry  
As with his guide rode Marmion by.  
Loud were their clamouring tongues, as when  
The clanging sea-fowl leave the fen,  
And, with their cries discordant mix'd,  
Grumbled and yell'd the pipes betwixt.”

In hardly any of Scott's poetry do we find much of what is called the *curiosa felicitas* of expression,—the magic use of *words*, as distinguished from the mere general effect of vigour, purity, and concentration of purpose. But in *Marmion* occasionally we do find such a use. Take this description, for instance, of the Scotch tents near Edinburgh :—

“ A thousand did I say ? I ween  
Thousands on thousands there were seen,  
That chequer'd all the heath between  
The streamlet and the town ;  
In crossing ranks extending far,  
Forming a camp irregular ;  
Oft giving way where still there stood  
Some relics of the old oak wood,  
That darkly huge did intervene,  
*And tamed the glaring white with green ;*  
In these extended lines there lay  
A martial kingdom's vast array.”

The line I have italicized seems to me to have more of the poet's special magic of expression than is at all usual with Scott. The conception of the peaceful green oak-wood *taming* the glaring white of the tented field, is as fine in idea as it is in relation to the effect of the mere colour on the eye. Judge Scott's poetry by whatever test you will—whether it be a test of that which is peculiar to it, its glow of national feeling, its martial ardour, its swift and rugged simplicity, or whether it be a test of that which is common to it with most other poetry, its attraction for all romantic excitements, its special feeling for the pomp and circumstance of war, its love of light and colour—and tested either way, *Marmion* will remain his finest poem. The battle of Flodden Field touches his highest point in its expression of stern patriotic feeling, in its passionate love of daring, and in the force and swiftness of its movement, no less than in the brilliancy of its romantic interests, the charm of its picturesque detail, and the glow of its scenic colouring. No poet ever equalled Scott in the description of wild and simple scenes and the expression of wild and simple feelings. But I have said enough now of his poetry, in which, good as it is, Scott's genius did not reach its highest point. The hurried tramp of his somewhat monotonous metre, is

apt to weary the ears of men who do not find their sufficient happiness, as he did, in dreaming of the wild and daring enterprises of his loved Border-land. The very quality in his verse which makes it seize so powerfully on the imaginations of plain, bold, adventurous men, often makes it hammer fatiguingly against the brain of those who need the relief of a wider horizon and a richer world.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS.

I HAVE anticipated in some degree, in speaking of Scott's later poetical works, what, in point of time at least, should follow some slight sketch of his chosen companions, and of his occupations in the first period of his married life. Scott's most intimate friend for some time after he went to college, probably the one who most stimulated his imagination in his youth, and certainly one of his most intimate friends to the very last, was William Clerk, who was called to the bar on the same day as Scott. He was the son of John Clerk of Eldin, the author of a book of some celebrity in its time on *Naval Tactics*. Even in the earliest days of this intimacy, the lads who had been Scott's fellow-apprentices in his father's office, saw with some jealousy his growing friendship with William Clerk, and remonstrated with Scott on the decline of his regard for them, but only succeeded in eliciting from him one of those outbursts of peremptory frankness which anything that he regarded as an attempt to encroach on his own interior liberty of choice always provoked. "I will never cut any man," he said, "unless I detect him in scoundrelism, but I know not what right any of you have to interfere with my choice of my company. As it is, I fairly own that though I like many of you very much, and have long done so, I think William Clerk well worth you all put together."\* Scott never lost the friendship which began with this eager enthusiasm, but his chief intimacy with Clerk was during his younger days.

In 1808 Scott describes Clerk as "a man of the most acute intellects and powerful apprehension, who, if he should ever shake loose the fetters of indolence by which he has been hitherto trammelled, cannot fail to be distinguished in the highest degree." Whether for the reason suggested, or for some other, Clerk never actually gained any other distinction so great as his friendship with Scott conferred upon him. Probably Scott had discerned the true secret of his friend's comparative obscurity. Even while preparing for the bar, when they had

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 214.

agreed to go on alternate mornings to each other's lodgings to read together, Scott found it necessary to modify the arrangement by always visiting his friend, whom he usually found in bed. It was William Clerk who sat for the picture of Darsie Latimer, the hero of *Redgauntlet*,—whence we should suppose him to have been a lively, generous, susceptible, contentious, and rather helter-skelter young man, much alive to the ludicrous in all situations, very eager to see life in all its phases, and somewhat vain of his power of adapting himself equally to all these phases. Scott tells a story of Clerk's being once baffled—almost for the first time—by a stranger in a stage coach, who would not, or could not, talk to him on any subject, until at last Clerk addressed to him this stately remonstrance, "I have talked to you, my friend, on all the ordinary subjects—literature, farming, merchandise, gaming, game-laws, horse-races, suits-at-law, politics, swindling, blasphemy, and philosophy,—is there any one subject that you will favour me by opening upon?" "Sir," replied the inscrutable stranger, "can you say anything clever about '*bend-leather*?' "\* No doubt this superficial familiarity with a vast number of subjects was a great fascination to Scott, and a great stimulus to his own imagination. To the last he held the same opinion of his friend's latent powers. "To my thinking," he wrote in his diary in 1825, "I never met a man of greater powers, of more complete information on all desirable subjects." But in youth at least Clerk seems to have had what Sir Walter calls a characteristic Edinburgh complaint, the "itch for disputation," and though he softened this down in later life, he had always that slight contentiousness of bias which enthusiastic men do not often heartily like, and which may have prevented Scott from continuing to the full the close intimacy of those earlier years. Yet almost his last record of a really delightful evening refers to a bachelor's dinner given by Mr. Clerk, who remained unmarried, as late as 1827, after all Sir Walter's worst troubles had come upon him. "In short," says the diary, "we really laughed, and real laughter is as rare as real tears. I must say, too, there was a *heart*; a kindly feeling prevailed over the party. Can London give such a dinner?" † It is clear, then, that Clerk's charm for his friend survived to the last, and that it was not the mere inexperience of boyhood which made Scott esteem him so highly in his early days.

If Clerk pricked, stimulated, and sometimes badgered Scott, another of his friends who became more and more intimate with him, as life went on, and who died before him, always soothed him, partly by his gentleness, partly by his almost feminine dependence. This was William Erskine, also a barrister, and son of an Episcopalian clergyman in Perthshire,—to whose influence it is probably due that

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 341.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 75.



Scott himself always read the English Church service in his own country house, and does not appear to have retained the Presbyterianism into which he was born. Erskine, who was afterwards raised to the Bench as Lord Kinnedder—a distinction which he did not survive for many months—was a good classic, a man of fine, or, as some of his companions thought, of almost superfine taste. The style apparently for which he had credit must have been a somewhat mimini-pimini style, if we may judge by Scott's attempt in *The Bridal of Triermain*, to write in a manner which he intended to be attributed to his friend. Erskine was left a widower in middle life, and Scott used to accuse him of philandering with pretty women,—a mode of love-making which Scott certainly contrived to render into verse, in painting Arthur's love-making to Lucy in that poem. It seems that some absolutely false accusation brought against Lord Kinnedder, of an intrigue with a lady with whom he had been thus philandering, broke poor Erskine's heart, during his first year as a Judge. "The Counsellor (as Scott always called him) was," says Mr. Lockhart, "a little man of feeble make, who seemed unhappy when his pony got beyond a footpace, and had never, I should suppose, addicted himself to any out-of-door's sports whatever. He would, I fancy, as soon have thought of slaying his own mutton as of handling a fowling-piece; he used to shudder when he saw a party equipped for coursing, as if murder was in the wind; but the cool, meditative angler was in his eyes the abomination of abominations. His small elegant features, hectic cheek and soft hazel eyes, were the index of the quick, sensitive, gentle spirit within." "He would dismount to lead his horse down what his friend hardly perceived to be a descent at all; grew pale at a precipice; and, unlike the white lady of Avenel, would go a long way round for a bridge." He shrank from general society, and lived in closer intimacies, and his intimacy with Scott was of the closest. He was Scott's confidant in all literary matters, and his advice was oftener followed on questions of style and form, and of literary enterprise, than that of any other of Scott's friends. It is into Erskine's mouth that Scott puts the supposed exhortation to himself to choose more classical subjects for his poems:—

"Approach those masters o'er whose tomb  
Immortal laurels ever bloom;  
Instructive of the feebler bard,  
Still from the grave their voice is heard;  
From them, and from the paths they show'd,  
Choose honour'd guide and practised road;  
Nor ramble on through brake and maze,  
With harpers rude of barbarous days."

And it is to Erskine that Scott replies,—

"For me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask  
The classic poet's well-conn'd task?  
Nay, Erskine, nay,—on the wild hill

Let the wild heath-bell flourish still ;  
 Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,  
 But freely let the woodbine twine,  
 And leave untrimm'd the eglantine :  
 Nay, my friend, nay,—since oft thy praise  
 Hath given fresh vigour to my lays ;  
 Since oft thy judgment could refine  
 My flatten'd thought or cumbrous line,  
 Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,  
 And in the minstrel spare the friend ! ”

It was Erskine, too, as Scott expressly states in his introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate*, who reviewed with far too much partiality the *Tales of my Landlord*, in the *Quarterly Review*, for January, 1817,—a review unjustifiably included among Scott's own critical essays, on the very insufficient ground that the MS. reached Murray in Scott's own handwriting. There can, however, be no doubt at all that Scott copied out his friend's MS., in order to increase the mystification which he so much enjoyed as to the authorship of his variously named series of tales. Possibly enough, too, he may have drawn Erskine's attention to the evidence which justified his sketch of the Puritans in *Old Mortality*, evidence which he certainly intended at one time to embody in a reply of his own to the adverse criticism on that book. But though Erskine was Scott's *alter ego* for literary purposes, it is certain that Erskine, with his fastidious, not to say finical, sense of honour, would never have lent his name to cover a puff written by Scott of his own works. A man who, in Scott's own words, died “a victim to a hellishly false story, or rather, I should say, to the sensibility of his own nature, which could not endure even the shadow of reproach,—like the ermine, which is said to pine if its fur is soiled,” was not the man to father a puff, even by his dearest friend, on that friend's own creations. Erskine was indeed almost feminine in his love of Scott ; but he was feminine with all the irritable and scrupulous delicacy of a man who could not derogate from his own ideal of right, even to serve a friend.

Another friend of Scott's earlier days was John Leyden, Scott's most efficient coadjutor in the collection of the *Border Minstrelsy*,—that eccentric genius, marvellous linguist, and good-natured bear, who, bred a shepherd in one of the wildest valleys of Roxburghshire, had accumulated before the age of nineteen an amount of learning which confounded the Edinburgh Professors, and who, without any previous knowledge of medicine, prepared himself to pass an examination for the medical profession, at six months' notice of the offer of an assistant-surgeoncy in the East India Company. It was Leyden who once walked between forty and fifty miles and back, for the sole purpose of visiting an old person who possessed a copy of a border ballad that was wanting for the *Minstrelsy*. Scott was sitting at dinner one day with company, when he heard a sound at a dis-

tance, "like that of the whistling of a tempest through the torn rigging of a vessel which scuds before it. The sounds increased as they approached more near; and Leyden (to the great astonishment of such of the guests as did not know him) burst into the room chanting the desiderated ballad with the most enthusiastic gesture, and all the energy of what he used to call the *saw-tones* of his voice." \* Leyden's great antipathy was Ritson, an ill-conditioned antiquarian, of vegetarian principles, whom Scott alone of all the antiquarians of that day could manage to tame and tolerate. In Scott's absence one day, during his early married life at Lasswade, Mrs. Scott inadvertently offered Ritson a slice of beef, when that strange man burst out in such outrageous tones at what he chose to suppose an insult, that Leyden threatened to "thraw his neck" if he were not silent, a threat which frightened Ritson out of the cottage. On another occasion, simply in order to tease Ritson, Leyden complained that the meat was overdone, and sent to the kitchen for a plate of literally raw beef, and ate it up solely for the purpose of shocking his crazy rival in antiquarian research. Poor Leyden did not long survive his experience of the Indian climate. And with him died a passion for knowledge of a very high order, combined with no inconsiderable poetical gifts. It was in the study of such eccentric beings as Leyden that Scott doubtless acquired his taste for painting the humours of Scotch character.

Another wild shepherd, and wilder genius among Scott's associates, not only in those earlier days, but to the end, was that famous Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg, who was always quarrelling with his brother poet, as far as Scott permitted it, and making it up again when his better feelings returned. In a shepherd's dress, and with hands fresh from sheep-shearing, he came to dine for the first time with Scott in Castle Street, and finding Mrs. Scott lying on the sofa, immediately stretched himself at full length on another sofa; for, as he explained afterwards, "I thought I could not do better than to imitate the lady of the house." At dinner, as the wine passed, he advanced from "Mr. Scott," to "Shirra" (Sheriff), "Scott" "Walter," and finally "Wattie," till at supper he convulsed every one by addressing Mrs. Scott familiarly as "Charlotte." † Hogg wrote certain short poems, the beauty of which in their kind Sir Walter himself never approached; but he was a man almost without self-restraint or self-knowledge, though he had a great deal of self-importance, and hardly knew how much he owed to Scott's magnanimous and ever-forgiving kindness, or if he did, felt the weight of gratitude a burden on his heart. Very different was William Laidlaw, a farmer on the banks of the Yarrow, always Scott's friend, and afterwards

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 56.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 168-9.



his manager at Abbotsford, through whose hand he dictated many of his novels. Mr. Laidlaw was one of Scott's humbler friends,—a class of friends with whom he seems always to have felt more completely at his ease than any others—who gave at least as much as he received, one of those wise, loyal, and thoughtful men in a comparatively modest position of life, whom Scott delighted to trust, and never trusted without finding his trust justified. In addition to these Scotch friends, Scott had made, even before the publication of his *Border Minstrelsy*, not a few in London or its neighbourhood,—of whom the most important at this time was the grey-eyed, hatchet-faced, courteous George Ellis, as Leyden described him, the author of various works on ancient English poetry and romance, who combined with a shrewd, satirical vein, and a great knowledge of the world, political as well as literary, an exquisite taste in poetry, and a warm heart. Certainly Ellis's criticism on his poems was the truest and best that Scott ever received; and had he lived to read his novels,—only one of which was published before Ellis's death,—he might have given Scott more useful help than either Ballantyne or even Erskine.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### FIRST COUNTRY HOMES.

So completely was Scott by nature an out-of-doors man that he cannot be adequately known either through his poems or through his friends, without also knowing his external surroundings and occupations. His first country home was the cottage at Lasswade, on the Esk, about six miles from Edinburgh, which he took in 1798, a few months after his marriage, and retained till 1804. It was a pretty little cottage, in the beautification of which Scott felt great pride, and where he exercised himself in the small beginnings of those tastes for altering and planting which grew so rapidly upon him, and at last enticed him into castle-building and tree-culture on a dangerous, not to say, ruinous scale. One of Scott's intimate friends, the master of Rokeby, by whose house and neighbourhood the poem of that name was suggested, Mr. Morritt, walked along the Esk in 1808 with Scott four years after he had left it, and was taken out of his way to see it. "I have been bringing you," he said, "where there is little enough to be seen, only that Scotch cottage, but though not worth looking at, I could not pass it. It was our first country house when newly married, and many a contrivance it had to make it comfortable. I made a dining-table for it with my own hands. Look at these two miserable willow-trees on either side the gate into the enclosure; they are tied together

at the top to be an arch, and a cross made of two sticks over them is not yet decayed. To be sure it is not much of a lion to show a stranger ; but I wanted to see it again myself, for I assure you that after I had constructed it, *mamma* (Mrs. Scott) and I both of us thought it so fine, we turned out to see it by moonlight, and walked backwards from it to the cottage-door, in admiration of our own magnificence and its picturesque effect." It was here at Lasswade that he bought the phaeton, which was the first wheeled carriage that ever penetrated to Liddesdale, a feat which it accomplished in the first of August of this century.

When Scott left the cottage at Lasswade in 1804, it was to take up his country residence in Selkirkshire, of which he had now been made sheriff, in a beautiful little house belonging to his cousin, Major-General Sir James Russell, and known to all the readers of Scott's poetry as the Ashestiel of the *Marmion* introductions. The Glenkinnon brook dashes in a deep ravine through the grounds to join the Tweed ; behind the house rise the hills which divide the Tweed from the Yarrow ; and an easy ride took Scott into the scenery of the Yarrow. The description of Ashestiel, and the brook which runs through it, in the introduction to the first canto of *Marmion* is indeed one of the finest specimens of Scott's descriptive poetry :—

"November's sky is chill and drear,  
November's leaf is red and sear ;  
Late, gazing down the steepy linn,  
That hems our little garden in,  
Low in its dark and narrow glen,  
You scarce the rivulet might ken,  
So thick the tangled greenwood grew,  
So feeble trill'd the streamlet through ;  
Now, murmuring hoarse, and frequent seen,  
Through bush and briar no longer green,  
An angry brook, it sweeps the glade,  
Brawls over rock and wild cascade,  
And, foaming brown with doubled speed,  
Hurries its waters to the Tweed."

Selkirk was his nearest town, and that was seven miles from Ashestiel ; and even his nearest neighbour was at Yair, a few miles off lower down the Tweed,—Yair of which he wrote in another of the introductions to *Marmion* :—

"From Yair, which hills so closely bind  
Scarce can the Tweed his passage find,  
Though much he fret, and chafe, and toil,  
Till all his eddyng currents boil."

At Ashestiel it was one of his greatest delights to look after his relative's woods, and to dream of planting and thinning woods of his own, a dream only too amply realized. It was here that a new kitchen-

range was sunk for some time in the ford, which was so swollen by a storm in 1805 that the horse and cart that brought it were themselves with difficulty rescued from the waters. And it was here that Scott first entered on that active life of literary labour in close conjunction with an equally active life of rural sport, which gained him a well-justified reputation as the hardest worker and the heartiest player in the kingdom. At Lasswade Scott's work had been done at night; but serious headaches made him change his habit at Ashestiel, and rise steadily at five, lighting his own fire in winter. "Arrayed in his shooting-jacket, or whatever dress he meant to use till dinner-time, he was seated at his desk by six o'clock, all his papers arranged before him in the most accurate order, and his books of reference marshalled around him on the floor, while at least one favourite dog lay watching his eye, just beyond the line of circumvallation. Thus, by the time the family assembled for breakfast, between nine and ten, he had done enough, in his own language, 'to break the neck of the day's work.' After breakfast a couple of hours more were given to his solitary tasks, and by noon he was, as he used to say, his 'own man.' When the weather was bad, he would labour incessantly all the morning; but the general rule was to be out and on horseback by one o'clock at the latest; while, if any more distant excursion had been proposed overnight, he was ready to start on it by ten; his occasional rainy days of unintermitted study, forming, as he said, a fund in his favour, out of which he was entitled to draw for accommodation whenever the sun shone with special brightness." In his earlier days none of his horses liked to be fed except by their master. When Brown Adam was saddled, and the stable-door opened, the horse would trot round to the leaping-on stone of his own accord, to be mounted, and was quite intractable under any one but Scott. Scott's life might well be fairly divided, just as history is divided, into reigns—by the succession of his horses and dogs. The reigns of Captain, Lieutenant, Brown Adam, Daisy, divide at least the period up to Waterloo; while the reigns of Sybil Grey, and the Covenantanter, or Douce Davie, divide the period of Scott's declining years. During the brilliant period of the earlier novels we hear less of Scott's horses; but of his deerhounds there is an unbroken succession. Camp, Maida (the "Bevis" of *Woodstock*), and Nimrod, reigned successively between Sir Walter's marriage and his death. It was Camp on whose death he relinquished a dinner invitation previously accepted, on the ground that the death of "an old friend" rendered him unwilling to dine out: Maida to whom he erected a marble monument, and Nimrod of whom he spoke so affectingly as too good a dog for his diminished fortunes during his absence in Italy on the last hopeless journey.

Scott's amusements at Ashestiel, besides riding, in which he was fearless to rashness, and coursing, which was the chief form of sport



ing in the neighbourhood, comprehended "burning the water," as salmon-spearing by torchlight was called, in the course of which he got many a ducking. Mr. Skene gives an amusing picture of their excursions together from Ashestiel among the hills, he himself followed by a lanky Savoyard, and Scott by a portly Scotch butler—both servants alike highly sensitive as to their personal dignity—on horses which neither of the attendants could sit well. "Scott's heavy lumbering buffetier had provided himself against the mountain storms with a huge cloak, which, when the cavalcade was at gallop, streamed at full stretch from his shoulders, and kept flapping in the other's face, who, having more than enough to do in preserving his own equilibrium, could not think of attempting at any time to control the pace of his steed, and had no relief but fuming and *pesteing* at the *sacré manteau*, in language happily unintelligible to its wearer. Now and then some ditch or turf-fence rendered it indispensable to adventure on a leap, and no farce could have been more amusing than the display of politeness which then occurred between these worthy equestrians, each courteously declining in favour of his friend the honour of the first experiment, the horses fretting impatient beneath them, and the dogs clamouring encouragement.\* Such was Scott's order of life at Ashestiel, where he remained from 1804 to 1812. As to his literary work here, it was enormous. Besides finishing *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, writing *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, part of *The Bridal of Triermain*, and part of *Rokeby*, and writing reviews, he wrote a *Life of Dryden*, and edited his works anew with some care, in eighteen volumes; edited *Somers's Collection of Tracts*, in thirteen volumes, quarto; *Sir Ralph Sadler's Life, Letters, and State Papers*, in three volumes, quarto; *Miss Seward's Life and Poetical Works*, *The Secret History of the Court of James I.*, in two volumes; *Strutt's Queenhoo Hall*, in four volumes, 12mo., and various other single volumes, and began his heavy work on the edition of Swift. This was the literary work of eight years, during which he had the duties of his Sheriffship, and, after he gave up his practice as a barrister, the duties of his Deputy Clerkship of Session to discharge regularly. The editing of Dryden alone would have seemed to most men of leisure a pretty full occupation for these eight years, and though I do not know that Scott edited with the anxious care with which that sort of work is often now prepared, that he went into all the arguments for a doubtful reading with the pains that Mr. Dyce spent on the various readings of Shakespeare, or that Mr. Spedding spent on a various reading of Bacon, yet Scott did his work in a steady, workmanlike manner, which satisfied the most fastidious critics of that day, and he was never, I believe, charged with hurrying or scamping it. His biographies of Swift and Dryden

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 263-9.

are plain solid pieces of work—not exactly the works of art which biographies have been made in our day—not comparable to Carlyle's studies of Cromwell or Frederick, or, in point of art, even to the life of John Sterling, but still sensible and interesting, sound in judgment, and animated in style.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### REMOVAL TO ABBOTSFORD, AND LIFE THERE.

IN May, 1812, Scott, having now at last obtained the salary of the Clerkship of Session, the work of which he had for more than five years discharged without pay, indulged himself in realizing his favourite dream of buying a "mountain farm" at Abbotsford,—five miles lower down the Tweed than his cottage at Ashestiel, which was now again claimed by the family of Russell,—and migrated thither with his household gods. The children long remembered the leave-taking as one of pure grief, for the villagers were much attached both to Scott and to his wife, who had made herself greatly beloved by her untiring goodness to the sick among her poor neighbours. But Scott himself describes the migration as a scene in which their neighbours found no small share of amusement. "Our fitting and removal from Ashestiel baffled all description; we had twenty-five cartloads of the veriest trash in nature, besides dogs, pigs, ponies, poultry, cows, calves, bare-headed wenches, and bare-breeched boys."\*

To another friend Scott wrote that the neighbours had "been much delighted with the procession of my furniture, in which old swords, bows, targets, and lances, made a very conspicuous show. A family of turkeys was accommodated within the helmet of some *preux chevalier* of ancient border fame; and the very cows, for aught I know, were bearing banners and muskets. I assure your ladyship that this caravan, attended by a dozen of ragged rosy peasant children, carrying fishing-rods and spears, and leading ponies, greyhounds, and spaniels, would, as it crossed the Tweed, have furnished no bad subject for the pencil, and really reminded me of one of the gypsy groups of Callot upon their march."†

The place thus bought for 4000*l.*,—half of which, according to Scott's bad and sanguine habit, was borrowed from his brother, and half raised on the security of a poem at the moment of sale wholly unwritten, and not completed even when he removed to Abbotsford—

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 6.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 3.

"Rokeby"—became only too much of an idol for the rest of Scott's life. Mr. Lockhart admits that before the crash came he had invested 29,000*l.* in the purchase of land alone. But at this time only the kernel of the subsequent estate was bought, in the shape of a hundred acres or rather more, part of which ran along the shores of the Tweed—"a beautiful river flowing broad and bright over a bed of milk-white pebbles, unless here and there where it darkened into a deep pool, overhung as yet only by birches and alders." There was also a poor farm-house, a staring barn, and a pond so dirty that it had hitherto given the name of "Clarty Hole" to the place itself. Scott renamed the place from the adjoining ford which was just above the confluence of the Gala with the Tweed. He chose the name of Abbotsford because the land had formerly all belonged to the Abbots of Melrose,—the ruin of whose beautiful abbey was visible from many parts of the little property. On the other side of the river the old British barrier called "the Catrail" was full in view. As yet the place was not planted,—the only effort made in this direction by its former owner, Dr. Douglas, having been a long narrow stripe of firs, which Scott used to compare to a black hair-comb, and which gave the name of "The Doctor's Redding-Kame" to the stretch of woods of which it is still the central line. Such was the place which he made it the too great delight of the remainder of his life to increase and beautify, by spending on it a good deal more than he had earned, and that too in times when he should have earned a good deal more than he ought to have thought even for a moment of spending. The cottage grew to a mansion, and the mansion to a castle. The farm by the Tweed made him long for a farm by the Cauldshiel's loch, and the farm by the Cauldshiel's loch for Thomas the Rhymer's Glen; and as, at every step in the ladder, his means of buying were really increasing—though they were so cruelly discounted and forestalled by this growing land-hunger,—Scott never realized into what troubles he was carefully running himself.

Of his life at Abbotsford at a later period, when his building was greatly enlarged, and his children grown up, we have a brilliant picture from the pen of Mr. Lockhart. And though it does not belong to his first years at Abbotsford, I cannot do better than include it here as conveying probably better than anything I could elsewhere find, the charm of that ideal life which lured Scott on from one project to another in that scheme of castle-building, in relation to which he confused so dangerously the world of dreams with the harder world of wages, capital, interest, and rent.

"I remember saying to William Allan one morning, as the whole party mustered before the porch after breakfast, 'A faithful sketch of what you at this moment see would be more interesting a hundred years hence than the grandest so-called historical picture that you will ever exhibit in Somerset House;' and my friend agreed with me so cordially that I often wondered afterwards he had not attempted to realize the suggestion. The subject ought, however, to have been treated conjointly by him (or Wilkie) and Edwin Landseer.



"It was a clear, bright September morning, with a sharpness in the air that doubled the animating influence of the sunshine, and all was in readiness for a grand coursing match on Newark Hill. The only guest who had chalked out other sport for himself was the staunchest of anglers, Mr Rose; but he too was there on his *shelly*, armed with his salmon-rod and landing-net, and attended by his humorous squire, Ilinves, and Charlie Purdie, a brother of Tom, in those days the most celebrated fisherman of the district. This little group of Waltonians, bound for Lord Somerville's preserve, remained lounging about to witness the start of the main cavalcade. Sir Walter, mounted on Sybil, was marshalling the order of procession with a huge hunting-whip; and among a dozen frolicsome youths and maidens, who seemed disposed to laugh at all discipline, appeared, each on horseback, each as eager as the youngest sportsman in the troop, Sir Humphry Davy, Dr. Wollaston, and the patriarch of Scottish *belles lettres*, Henry Mackenzie. The Man of Feeling, however, was persuaded with some difficulty to resign his steed for the present to his faithful negro follower, and to join Lady Scott in the sociable, until we should reach the ground of our *battue*. Laidlaw, on a long-tailed, wiry Highlander, yclept Hoddin Grey, which carried him nimbly and stoutly, although his feet almost touched the ground as he sat, was the adjutant. But the most picture-que figure was the illustrious inventor of the safety-lamp. He had come for his favourite sport of angling, and had been practising it successfully with Rose, his travelling-companion, for two or three days preceding this, but he had not prepared for coursing fields, and had left Charlie Purdie's troop for Sir Walter's on a sudden thought; and his fisherman's costume—a brown hat with flexible brim, surrounded with line upon line, and innumerable fly-hooks, jack boots worthy of a Dutch smuggler, and a fustian surtout dabbled with the blood of salmon,—made a fine contrast with the smart jackets, white cord breeches, and well-polished jockey-boots of the less distinguished cavaliers about him. Dr. Wollaston was in black, and, with his noble, serene dignity of countenance, might have passed for a sporting archbishop. Mr. Mackenzie, at this time in the seventy-sixth year of his age, with a white hat turned up with green, green spectacles, green jacket, and long brown leather gaiters buttoned upon his nether anatomy, wore a dog-whistle round his neck and had all over the air of as resolute a devotee as the gay captain of Huntly Burn. Tom Purdie and his subalterns had preceded us by a few hours with all the greyhounds that could be collected at Abbotsford, Darnick, and Melrose; but the giant Maia had remained as his master's orderly, and now gambolled about Sybil Grey, barking for mere joy, like a spaniel puppy.

"The order of march had been all settled, and the sociable was just getting under way, when the *Lady Anne* broke from the line, screaming with laughter, and exclaimed, 'Papa! papa! I know you could never think of going without your pet.' Scott looked around, and I rather think there was a blush as well as a smile upon his face, when he perceived a little black pig frisking about his pony, and evidently a self-elected addition to the party of the day. He tried to look stern, and cracked his whip at the creature, but was in a moment obliged to join in the general cheers. Poor piggy soon found a strap round his neck, and was dragged into the back-gate. Scott, watching the retreat, repeated with mock pathos the first verse of an old pastoral song:—

"What will I do gin my hoggie die?  
My, joy, my pride, my hoggie!  
My only beast, I had nae mae,  
And wow! but I was rogie!"

The cheers were redoubled, and the squadron moved on. This pig had taken, nobody could tell how, a most sentimental attachment to Scott, and was constantly urging its pretension to be admitted a regular member of his *tail*, along with the greyhounds and terriers; but indeed I remember him suffering another summer under the same sort of pertinacity on the part of an affectionate hen. I leave the explanation for philosophers; but such were the facts. I have too much respect for the vulgarly calumniated donkey to name him in the same category of pets with the pig and the hen; but a year or two after this time my wife used to drive a

couple of these animals in a little garden chair, and whenever her father appeared at the door of our cottage, we were sure to see Hannah More and Lady Morgan (as Anne Scott had wickedly christened them) trotting from their pasture to lay their noses over the paling, and, as Washington Irving says of the old white-haired hedger with the Parisian snuff box, 'to have a pleasant crack wi' the laird.' '\*

Carlyle, in his criticism on Scott—a criticism which will hardly, I think, stand the test of criticism in its turn, so greatly does he overdo the reaction against the first excessive appreciation of his genius—adds a contribution of his own to this charming idyll, in reference to the natural fascination which Scott seemed to exert over almost all dumb creatures. A little Blenheim cocker, "one of the smallest, beautifullest, and tiniest of lapdogs," with which Carlyle was well acquainted, and which was also one of the shyest of dogs, that would crouch towards his mistress and draw back "with angry timidity" if any one did but look at him admiringly, once met in the street "a tall, singular, busy-looking man," who halted by. The dog ran towards him and began "fawning, frisking, licking at his feet;" and every time he saw Sir Walter afterwards, in Edinburgh, he repeated his demonstration of delight. Thus discriminating was this fastidious Blenheim cocker even in the busy streets of Edinburgh.

And Scott's attraction for dumb animals was only a lesser form of his attraction for all who were in any way dependent on him, especially his own servants and labourers. The story of his demeanour towards them is one of the most touching ever written. "Sir Walter speaks to every man as if they were blood-relations," was the common *formula* in which this demeanour was described. Take this illustration. There was a little hunchbacked tailor, named William Goodfellow, living on his property (but who at Abbotsford was termed Robin Goodfellow). This tailor was employed to make the curtains for the new library, and had been very proud of his work, but fell ill soon afterwards, and Sir Walter was unremitting in his attention to him. "I can never forget," says Mr. Lockhart, "the evening on which the poor tailor died. When Scott entered the hovel, he found everything silent, and inferred from the looks of the good woman in attendance that the patient had fallen asleep, and that they feared his sleep was the final one. He murmured some syllables of kind regret: at the sound of his voice the dying tailor unclosed his eyes, and eagerly and wistfully sat up, clasping his hands with an expression of rapturous gratefulness and devotion that, in the midst of deformity, disease, pain, and wretchedness, was at once beautiful and sublime. He cried with a loud voice, 'The Lord bless and reward you!' and expired with the effort."† Still more striking is the account of his relation with Tom Purdie, the wide-mouthed, under-sized, broad-shouldered,

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 238-242.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 218,

square-made, thin-flanked woodsman, so well known afterwards by all Scott's friends as he waited for his master in his green shooting-jacket, white hat, and drab trousers. Scott first made Tom Purdie's acquaintance in his capacity as judge, the man being brought before him for poaching, at the time that Scott was living at Ashiestiel. Tom gave so touching an account of his circumstances—work scarce—wife and children in want—grouse abundant—and his account of himself was so fresh and even humorous, that Scott let him off the penalty, and made him his shepherd. He discharged these duties so faithfully that he came to be his master's forester and factotum, and indeed one of his best friends, though a little disposed to tyrannize over Scott in his own fashion. A visitor describes him as unpacking a box of new importations for his master "as if he had been sorting some toys for a restless child." But after Sir Walter had lost the bodily strength requisite for riding, and was too melancholy for ordinary conversation, Tom Purdie's shoulder was his great stay in wandering through his woods, for with him he felt that he might either speak or be silent at his pleasure. "What a blessing there is," Scott wrote in his diary at that time, "in a fellow like Tom, whom no familiarity can spoil, whom you may scold and praise and joke with, knowing the quality of the man is unalterable in his love and reverence to his master." After Scott's failure, Mr. Lockhart writes: "Before I leave this period, I must note how greatly I admired the manner in which all his dependents appeared to have met the reverse of his fortunes—a reverse which inferred very considerable alteration in the circumstances of every one of them. The butler, instead of being the easy chief of a large establishment, was now doing half the work of the house at probably half his former wages. Old Peter, who had been for five and twenty years a dignified coachman, was now ploughman in ordinary, only putting his horses to the carriage upon high and rare occasions; and so on with all the rest that remained of the ancient train. And all, to my view, seemed happier than they had ever done before."\* The illustration of this true confidence between Scott and his servants and labourers might be extended to almost any length.

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 170.



## CHAPTER IX.

## SCOTT'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BALLANTYNES.

BEFORE I make mention of Scott's greatest works, his novels, I must say a few words of his relation to the Ballantyne Brothers, who involved him, and were involved by him, in so many troubles, and with whose name the story of his broken fortunes is inextricably bound up. James Ballantyne, the elder brother, was a schoolfellow of Scott's at Kelso, and was the editor and manager of the *Kelso Mail*, an anti-democratic journal, which had a fair circulation. Ballantyne was something of an artist as regarded "type," and Scott got him therefore to print his *Minstrelsy of the Border*, the excellent workmanship of which attracted much attention in London. In 1802, on Scott's suggestion, Ballantyne moved to Edinburgh; and to help him to move, Scott, who was already meditating some investment of his little capital in business other than literary, lent him 500*l*. Between this and 1805, when Scott first became a partner of Ballantyne's in the printing business, he used every exertion to get legal and literary printing offered to James Ballantyne, and, according to Mr. Lockhart, the concern "grew and prospered." At Whitsuntide, 1805, when *The Lay* had been published, but before Scott had the least idea of the prospects of gain which mere literature would open to him, he formally, though secretly, joined Ballantyne as a partner in the printing business. He explains his motives for this step, so far at least as he then recalled them, in a letter written after his misfortunes, in 1826. "It is easy," he said, "no doubt for any friend to blame me for entering into connexion with commercial matters at all. But I wish to know what I could have done better—excluded from the bar, and then from all profits for six years, by my colleague's prolonged life. Literature was not in those days what poor Constable has made it; and with my little capital I was too glad to make commercially the means of supporting my family. I got but 600*l*. for *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and—it was a price that made men's hair stand on end—1000*l*. for *Marmion*. I have been far from suffering by James Ballantyne. I owe it to him to say, that his difficulties as well as his advantages are owing to me."

This, though a true, was probably a very imperfect account of Scott's motives. He ceased practising at the bar, I do not doubt, in great degree from a kind of hurt pride at his ill success at a time when he felt during every month more and more confidence in his own powers. He believed, with some justice, that he understood some of the secrets of popularity in literature, but he had always, till towards the end of his life, the greatest horror of resting on literature alone as his main resource; and he was not a man, nor was Lady Scott a woman, to pinch

and live narrowly. Were it only for his lavish generosity, that kind of life would have been intolerable to him. Hence, he reflected, that if he could but use his literary instinct to feed some commercial undertaking, managed by a man he could trust, he might gain a considerable percentage on his little capital, without so embarking in commerce as to oblige him either to give up his status as a sheriff, or his official duties as a clerk of session, or his literary undertakings. In his old schoolfellow, James Ballantyne, he believed he had found just such an agent as he wanted, the requisite link between literary genius like his own, and the world which reads and buys books; and he thought that, by feeling his way a little, he might secure, through this partnership, besides the then very bare rewards of authorship, at least a share in those more liberal rewards which commercial men managed to squeeze for themselves out of successful authors. And, further, he felt—and this was probably the greatest unconscious attraction for him in this scheme—that with James Ballantyne for his partner he should be the real leader and chief, and rather in the position of a patron and benefactor to his colleague, than of one in any degree dependent on the generosity or approval of others. “If I have a very strong passion in the world,” he once wrote of himself—and the whole story of his life seems to confirm it—“it is pride.”\* In James Ballantyne he had a faithful, but almost humble friend, with whom he could deal much as he chose, and fear no wound to his pride. He had himself helped Ballantyne to a higher line of business than any hitherto aspired to by him. It was his own book which first got the Ballantyne press its public credit. And if he could but create a great commercial success upon this foundation, he felt that he should be fairly entitled to share in the gains, which not merely his loan of capital, but his foresight and courage had opened to Ballantyne.

And it is quite possible that Scott might have succeeded—or at all events not seriously failed—if he had been content to stick to the printing firm of James Ballantyne and Co., and had not launched also into the bookselling and publishing firm of John Ballantyne and Co., or had never begun the wild and dangerous practice of forestalling his gains, and spending wealth which he had not earned. But when by way of feeding the printing press of James Ballantyne and Co., he started in 1809 the bookselling and publishing firm of John Ballantyne and Co., using as his agent a man as inferior in sterling worth to James, as James was inferior in general ability to himself, he carefully dug a mine under his own feet, of which we can only say, that nothing except his genius could have prevented it from exploding long before it did. The truth was evidently that James Ballantyne's respectful homage, and John's humorous appreciation, all but blinded

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 221.

Scott's eyes to the utter inadequacy of either of these men, especially the latter, to supply the deficiencies of his own character for conducting business of this kind with proper discretion. James Ballantyne, who was pompous and indolent, though thoroughly honest, and not without some intellectual insight, Scott used to call Aldiborontiphoscophornio. John, who was clever but frivolous, dissipated, and tricky, he termed Rigdumfunnidos, or his "little Picaroon." It is clear from Mr. Lockhart's account of the latter that Scott not only did not respect, but despised him, though he cordially liked him, and that he passed over, in judging him, vices which in a brother or son of his own he would severely have rebuked. I believe myself that his liking for co-operation with both, was greatly founded on his feeling that they were simply creatures of his, to whom he could pretty well dictate what he wanted,—colleagues whose inferiority to himself unconsciously flattered his pride. He was evidently inclined to resent bitterly the patronage of publishers. He sent word to Blackwood once with great hauteur, after some suggestion from that house had been made to him which appeared to him to interfere with his independence as an author, that he was one of "the Black Hussars" of literature, who would not endure that sort of treatment. Constable, who was really very liberal, hurt his sensitive pride through the *Edinburgh Review*, of which Jeffrey was editor. Thus the Ballantynes' great deficiency—that neither of them had any independent capacity for the publishing business, which would in any way hamper his discretion—though this is just what commercial partners ought to have had, or they were not worth their salt,—was, I believe, precisely what induced this Black Hussar of literature, in spite of his otherwise considerable sagacity and knowledge of human nature, to select them for partners.

And yet it is strange that he not only chose them, but chose the inferior and light-headed of the two for far the most important and difficult of the two businesses. In the printing concern there was at least this to be said, that of part of the business—the selection of type and the superintendence of the executive part,—James Ballantyne was a good judge. He was never apparently a good man of business, for he kept no strong hand over the expenditure and accounts, which is the core of success in every concern. But he understood types; and his customers were publishers, a wealthy and judicious class, who were not likely all to fail together. But to select a "Rigdumfunnidos,"—a dissipated comic-song singer and horse-fancier,—for the head of a publishing concern, was indeed a kind of insanity. It is told of John Ballantyne, that after the successful negotiation with Constable for *Rob Roy*, and while "hopping up and down in his glee," he exclaimed, "'Is Rob's gun here, Mr. Scott? Would you object to my trying the old barrel with a *few de joy*?' 'Nay, Mr. Puff,' said Scott, 'it would burst and blow you to the devil before your time.' 'Johnny, my man,' said Constable, 'what the mischief puts drawing at sight



into *your* head?' Scott laughed heartily at this innuendo; and then observing that the little man felt somewhat sore, called attention to the notes of a bird in the adjoining shrubbery. 'And by-the-by,' said he, as they continued listening, 'tis a long time, Johnny, since we have had "The Cobbler of Kelso."' Mr. Puff forthwith jumped up on a mass of stone, and seating himself in the proper attitude of one working with an awl, began a favourite interlude, mimicking a certain son of Crispin, at whose stall Scott and he had often lingered when they were schoolboys, and a blackbird, the only companion of his cell, that used to sing to him while he talked and whistled to it all day long. With this performance Scott was always delighted. Nothing could be richer than the contrast of the bird's wild, sweet notes, some of which he imitated with wonderful skill, and the accompaniment of the cobbler's hoarse, cracked voice, uttering all manner of endearing epithets, which Johnny multiplied and varied in a style worthy of the old women in Rabelais at the birth of Pantagruel.\* That passage gives precisely the kind of estimation in which John Ballantyne was held both by Scott and Constable. And yet it was to him that Scott entrusted the dangerous and difficult duty of setting up a new publishing house as a rival to the best publishers of the day. No doubt Scott really relied on his own judgment for working the publishing house. But except where his own books were concerned, no judgment could have been worse. In the first place, he was always wanting to do literary jobs for a friend, and so advised the publishing of all sorts of unsaleable books, because his friends desired to write them. In the next place, he was a genuine historian, and one of the antiquarian kind himself; he was himself really interested in all sorts of historical and antiquarian issues,—and very mistakenly gave the public credit for wishing to know what he himself wished to know. I should add that Scott's good nature and kindness of heart not only led him to help on many books which he knew in himself could never answer, and some which, as he well knew, would be altogether worthless, but that it greatly biassed his own intellectual judgment. Nothing can be plainer than that he really held his intimate friend, Joanna Baillie, a very great dramatic poet, a much greater poet than himself, for instance; one fit to be even mentioned as following—at a distance—in the track of Shakespeare. He supposes Erskine to exhort him thus:

"Or, if to touch such chord be thine,  
Restore the ancient tragic line,  
And emulate the notes that rung  
From the wild harp which silent hung  
By silver Avon's holy shore,  
Till twice a hundred years roll'd o'er,—

When she, the bold enchantress, came  
 With fearless hand and heart on flame.  
 From the pale willow snatched the treasure,  
 And swept it with a kindred measure,  
 Till Avon's swans, while rung the grove  
 With Montfort's bate and Basil's love.  
 Awakening at the inspired strain,  
 Deem'd their own Shakespeare lived again."

Avon's swans must have been Avon's geese, I think, if they had deemed anything of the kind. Joanna Baillie's dramas are "nice," and rather dull; now and then she can write a song with the ease and sweetness that suggest Shakespearian echoes. But Scott's judgment was obviously blinded by his just and warm regard for Joanna Baillie herself.

Of course with such interfering causes to bring unsaleable books to the house—of course I do not mean that John Ballantyne and Co. published for Joanna Baillie, or that they would have lost by it if they had—the new firm published all sorts of books which did not sell at all; while John Ballantyne himself indulged in a great many expenses and dissipations, for which John Ballantyne and Co. had to pay. Nor was it very easy for a partner who himself drew bills on the future—even though he were the well-spring of all the paying business the company had—to be very severe on a fellow partner who supplied his pecuniary needs in the same way. At all events, there is no question that all through 1813 and 1814 Scott was kept in constant suspense and fear of bankruptcy, by the ill-success of John Ballantyne and Co., and the utter want of straightforwardness in John Ballantyne himself as to the bills out, and which had to be provided against. It was the publication of *Waverley*, and the consequent opening up of the richest vein not only in Scott's own genius, but in his popularity with the public, which alone ended these alarms; and the many unsaleable works of John Ballantyne and Co. were then gradually disposed of to Constable and others, to their own great loss, as part of the conditions on which they received a share in the copyright of the wonderful novels which sold like wildfire. But though in this way the publishing business of John Ballantyne and Co. was saved, and its affairs pretty decently wound up, the printing firm remained saddled with some of their obligations; while Constable's business, on which Scott depended for the means with which he was buying his estate, building his castle, and settling money on his daughter-in-law, was seriously injured by the purchase of all this unsaleable stock.

I do not think that any one who looks into the complicated controversy between the representatives of the Ballantynes and Mr. Lockhart, concerning these matters, can be content with Mr. Lockhart's—no doubt perfectly sincere—judgment on the case. It is obvious that amidst these intricate accounts, he fell into one or two serious blun-

ders—blunders very unjust to James Ballantyne. And without pretending to have myself formed any minute judgment on the details, I think the following points clear :—(1.) That James Ballantyne was very severely judged by Mr. Lockhart, on grounds which were never alleged by Scott against him at all,—indeed on grounds on which he was expressly exempted from all blame by Sir Walter. (2.) That Sir Walter Scott was very severely judged by the representatives of the Ballantynes, on grounds on which James Ballantyne himself never brought any charge against him ; on the contrary, he declared that he had no charge to bring. (3.) That both Scott and his partners invited ruin by freely spending gains which they only expected to earn, and that in this Scott certainly set an example which he could hardly expect feebler men not to follow. On the whole, I think the troubles with the Ballantyne brothers brought to light not only that eager gambling spirit in him, which his grandfather indulged with better success and more moderation when he bought the hunter with money destined for a flock of sheep, and then gave up gambling forever, but a tendency still more dangerous, and in some respects involving an even greater moral defect,—I mean a tendency, chiefly due, I think, to a very deep-seated pride,—to prefer inferior men as working colleagues in business. And yet it is clear that if Scott were to dabble in publishing at all, he really needed the check of men of larger experience and less literary turn of mind. The great majority of consumers of popular literature are not, and indeed will hardly ever be, literary men ; and that is precisely why a publisher who is not, in the main, literary,—who looks on author's MSS. for the most part with distrust and suspicion, much as a rich man looks at a begging-letter, or a sober and judicious fish at an angler's fly—is so much less likely to run aground than such a man as Scott. The untried author should be regarded by a wise publisher as a natural enemy,—an enemy indeed of a class, rare specimens whereof will always be his best friends, and who, therefore should not be needlessly affronted—but also as one of a class of whom nineteen out of every twenty will dangle before the publisher's eyes wiles and hopes and expectations of the most dangerous and illusory character,—which constitute indeed the very perils that it is his true function in life skilfully to evade. The Ballantynes were quite unfit for this function ; first, they had not the experience requisite for it ; next, they were altogether too much under Scott's influence. No wonder that the partnership came to no good, and left behind it the germs of calamity even more serious still.



## CHAPTER X. •

## THE WAVERLEY NOVELS.

IN the summer of 1814, Scott took up again and completed—almost at a single heat,—a fragment of a Jacobite story, begun in 1805 and then laid aside. It was published anonymously, and its astonishing success turned back again the scales of Scott's fortunes, already inclining ominously towards a catastrophe. This story was *Waverley*. Mr. Carlyle has praised *Waverley* above its fellows. "On the whole, contrasting *Waverley*, which was carefully written, with most of its followers which were written extempore, one may regret the extempore method." This is, however, a very unfortunate judgment. Not one of the whole series of novels appears to have been written more completely extempore than the great bulk of *Waverley*, including almost everything that made it either popular with the million or fascinating to the fastidious; and it is even likely that this is one of the causes of its excellence.

"The last two volumes," says Scott, in a letter to Mr. Morritt, "were written in three weeks." And here is Mr. Lockhart's description of the effect which Scott's incessant toil during the composition produced on a friend whose window happened to command the novelist's study:—

"Happening to pass through Edinburgh in June, 1814, I dined one day with the gentleman in question (now the Honourable William Menzies, one of the Supreme Judges at the Cape of Good Hope), whose residence was then in George Street, situated very near to, and at right angles with, North Castle Street. It was a party of very young persons, most of them, like Menzies and myself, destined for the Bar of Scotland, all gay and thoughtless, enjoying the first flush of manhood, with little remembrance of the yesterday, or care of the morrow. When my companion's worthy father and uncle, after seeing two or three bottles go round, left the juveniles to themselves, the weather being hot, we adjourned to a library which had one large window looking northwards. After carousing here for an hour or more, I observed that a shade had come over the aspect of my friend, who happened to be placed immediately opposite to myself, and said something that intimated a fear of his being unwell. 'No,' said he, 'I shall be well enough presently, if you will only let me sit where you are, and take my chair; for there is a confounded hand in sight of me here, which has often bothered me before, and now it won't let me fill my glass with a good will.' I rose to change places with him accordingly, and he pointed out to me this hand, which, like the writing on Belshazzar's wall, disturbed his hour of hilarity. 'Since we sat down,' he said, 'I have been watching it—it fascinates my eye—it never stops—page after page is finished, and trown on that heap of MS., and still it goes on unwearied; and so it will be till candles are brought in, and God knows how long after that. It is the same every night—I can't stand a sight of it when I am not at my books.' 'Some stupid, dogged engrossing clerk, probably,' exclaimed myself, 'or some other giddy youth in our society.' 'No, boys,' said our host; 'I well know what hand it is—'tis Walter Scott's.' " \*

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 171-3.

If that is not extempore writing, it is difficult to say what extempore writing is. But in truth there is no evidence that any one of the novels was laboured, or even so much as carefully composed. Scott's method of composition was always the same; and, when writing an imaginative work, the rate of progress seems to have been pretty even, depending much more on the absence of disturbing engagements, than on any mental irregularity. The morning was always his brightest time; but morning or evening, in country or in town, well or ill, writing with his own pen or dictating to an amanuensis in the intervals of screaming-fits due to the torture of cramp in the stomach, Scott spun away at his imaginative web almost as evenly as a silkworm spins at its golden cocoon. Nor can I detect the slightest trace of any difference in quality between the stories, such as can be reasonably ascribed to comparative care or haste. There are differences, and even great differences, of course, ascribable to the less or greater suitability of the subject chosen to Scott's genius, but I can find no trace of the sort of cause to which Mr. Carlyle refers. Thus, few, I suppose, would hesitate to say that while *Old Mortality* is very near, if not quite, the finest of Scott's works, *The Black Dwarf* is not far from the other end of the scale. Yet the two were written in immediate succession (*The Black Dwarf* being the first of the two), and were published together, as the first series of *Tales of My Landlord*, in 1816. Nor do I think that any competent critic would find any clear deterioration of quality in the novels of the later years,—excepting of course the two written after the stroke of paralysis. It is true, of course, that some of the subjects which most powerfully stirred his imagination were among his earlier themes, and that he could not effectually use the same subject twice, though he now and then tried it. But making allowance for this consideration, the imaginative power of the novels is as astonishingly even as the rate of composition itself. For my own part, I greatly prefer *The Fortunes of Nigel* (which was written in 1822) to *Waverley*, which was begun in 1805, and finished in 1814, and though very many better critics would probably decidedly disagree, I do not think that any of them would consider this preference grotesque or purely capricious. Indeed, though *Anne of Geierstein*,—the last composed before Scott's stroke,—would hardly seem to any careful judge the equal of *Waverley*, I do not much doubt that if it had appeared in place of *Waverley*, it would have excited very nearly as much interest and admiration; nor that had *Waverley* appeared in 1829, in place of *Anne of Geierstein*, it would have failed to excite very much more. In these fourteen most effective years of Scott's literary life, during which he wrote twenty-three novels besides shorter tales, the best stories appear to have been on the whole the most rapidly written, probably because they took the strongest hold of the author's imagination.

Till near the close of his career as an author, Scott never avowed

his responsibility for any of these series of novels, and even took some pains to mystify the public as to the identity between the author of *Waverley* and the author of *Tales of my Landlord*. The care with which the secret was kept is imputed by Mr. Lockhart in some degree to the habit of mystery which had grown upon Scott during his secret partnership with the Ballantynes; but in this he seems to be confounding two very different phases of Scott's character. No doubt he was, as a professional man, a little ashamed of his commercial speculation, and unwilling to betray it. But he was far from ashamed of his literary enterprise, though it seems that he was at first very anxious lest a comparative failure, or even a mere moderate success, in a less ambitious sphere than that of poetry, should endanger the great reputation he had gained as a poet. That was apparently the first reason for secrecy. But, over and above this, it is clear that the mystery stimulated Scott's imagination and saved him trouble as well. He was obviously more free under the veil—free from the liability of having to answer for the views of life or history suggested in his stories; but besides this, what was of more importance to him, the slight disguise stimulated his sense of humour, and gratified the whimsical, boyish pleasure which he always had in acting an imaginary character. He used to talk of himself as a sort of Abon Hassan—a private man one day, and acting the part of a monarch the next—with the kind of glee which indicated a real delight in the change of parts, and I have little doubt that he threw himself with the more gusto into characters very different from his own, in consequence of the pleasure it gave him to conceive his friends hopelessly misled by this display of traits, with which he supposed that they could not have credited him even in imagination. Thus besides relieving him of a host of compliments which he did not enjoy, and enabling him the better to evade an ill-bred curiosity, the disguise no doubt was the same sort of fillip to the fancy which a mask and domino or a fancy dress are to that of their wearers. Even in a disguise a man cannot cease to be himself; but he can get rid of his improperly “imputed” righteousness—often the greatest burden he has to bear—and of all the expectations formed on the strength, as Mr. Clough says,—

“Of having been what one has been,  
What one thinks one is, or thinks that others suppose one.”

To some men the freedom of this disguise is a real danger and temptation. It never could have been so to Scott, who was in the main one of the simplest as well as the boldest and proudest of men. And as most men perhaps would admit that a good deal of even the best part of their nature is rather suppressed than expressed by the name by which they are known in the world, Scott must have felt this in a far higher degree, and probably regarded the manifold characters under which he was known to society, as representing him in some respects



more justly than any individual name could have done. His mind ranged hither and thither over a wide field—far beyond that of his actual experience,—and probably ranged over it all the more easily for not being absolutely tethered to a single class of associations by any public confession of his authorship. After all, when it became universally known that Scott was the only author of all these tales, it may be doubted whether the public thought as adequately of the imaginative efforts which had created them, as they did while they remained in some doubt whether there was a multiplicity of agencies at work, or only one. The uncertainty helped them to realize the many lives which were really led by the author of all these tales, more completely than any confession of the individual authorship could have done. The shrinking of activity in public curiosity and wonder which follows the final determination of such ambiguities, is very apt to result rather in a dwindling of the imaginative effort to enter into the genius which gave rise to them, than in an increase of respect for so manifold a creative power.

When Scott wrote, such fertility as his in the production of novels was regarded with amazement approaching to absolute incredulity. Yet he was in this respect only the advanced-guard of a not inconsiderable class of men and women who have a special gift for pouring out story after story, containing a great variety of figures, while retaining a certain even level of merit. There is more than one novelist of the present day who has far surpassed Scott in the number of his tales, and one at least of very high repute, who has, I believe, produced more even within the same time. But though to our larger experience, Scott's achievement, in respect of mere fertility, is by no means the miracle which it once seemed, I do not think one of his successors can compare with him for a moment in the ease and truth with which he painted, not merely the life of his own time and country—seldom indeed that of precisely his own time—but that of days long past, and often too of scenes far distant. The most powerful of all his stories, *Old Mortality*, was the story of a period more than a century and a quarter before he wrote; and others, which though inferior to this in force, are nevertheless, when compared with the so-called historical romances of any other English writer, what sunlight is to moonlight, if you can say as much for the latter as to admit even that comparison,—go back to the period of the Tudors, that is, two centuries and a half. *Quentin Durward*, which is all but amongst the best, runs back farther still, far into the previous century, while *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*, though not among the greatest of Scott's works, carry us back more than five hundred years. The new class of extempore novel writers, though more considerable than, sixty years ago, any one could have expected ever to see it, is still limited, and on any high level of merit will probably always be limited, to the delineation of the times of which the narrator has personal experience.

Scott seemed to have had something very like personal experience of a few centuries at least, judging by the ease and freshness with which he poured out his stories of these centuries, and though no one can pretend that even he could describe the period of the Tudors as Miss Austen described the country parsons and squires of George the Third's reign, or as Mr. Trollope describes the politicians and hunting-men of Queen Victoria's, it is nevertheless the evidence of a greater imagination to make us live so familiarly as Scott does amidst the political and religious controversies of two or three centuries' duration, to be the actual witnesses, as it were, of Margaret of Anjou's throes of vain ambition, and Mary Stuart's fascinating remorse, and Elizabeth's domineering and jealous balancings of noble against noble, of James the First's shrewd pedantries, and the Regent Murray's large forethought, of the politic craft of Argyle, the courtly ruthlessness of Claverhouse, and the high-bred clemency of Monmouth, than to reflect in countless modifications the freaks, figures, and fashions of our own time.

The most striking feature of Scott's romances is that, for the most part, they are pivoted on public rather than mere private interests and passions. With but few exceptions—(*The Antiquary*, *St. Ronan's Well*, and *Guy Mannering* are the most important)—Scott's novels give us an imaginative view, not of mere individuals, but of individuals as they are affected by the public strifes and social divisions of the age. And this it is which gives his books so large an interest for old and young, soldiers and statesmen, the world of society and the recluse, alike. You can hardly read any novel of Scott's and not become better aware what public life and political issues mean. And yet there is no artificiality, no elaborate attitudinizing before the antique mirrors of the past, like Bulwer's, no dressing out of clothes-horses like G. P. R. James. The boldness and freshness of the present are carried back into the past, and you see Papists and Puritans, Cavaliers and Roundheads, Jews, Jacobites, and freebooters, preachers, schoolmasters, mercenary soldiers, gipsies and beggars, all living the sort of life which the reader feels that in their circumstances and under the same conditions of time and place and parentage, he might have lived too. Indeed, no man can read Scott without being more of a public man, whereas the ordinary novel tends to make its readers rather less of one than before.

Next, though most of these stories are rightly called romances, no one can avoid observing that they give that side of life which is unromantic, quite as vigorously as the romantic side. This was not true of Scott's poems, which only expressed one-half of his nature, and were almost pure romances. But in the novels the business of life is even better portrayed than its sentiments. Mr. Bagehot, one of the ablest of Scott's critics, has pointed out this admirably in his essay on *The Waverley Novels*. "Many historical novelists," he says,

“especially those who with care and pains have read up the detail, are often evidently in a strait how to pass from their history to their sentiment. The fancy of Sir Walter could not help connecting the two. If he had given us the English side of the race to Derby, *he would have described the Bank of England paying in sixpences, and also the loves of the cashier.*” No one who knows the novels well can question this. Fergus MacIvor’s ways and means, his careful arrangements for receiving subsidies in black mail, are as carefully recorded as his lavish highland hospitalities; and when he sends his silver cup to the Gaelic bard who chaunts his greatness, the faithful historian does not forget to let us know that the cup is his last, and that he is hard-pressed for the generousities of the future. So too the habitual thievishness of the highlanders is pressed upon us quite as vividly as their gallantry and superstitions. And so careful is Sir Walter to paint the petty pedantries of the Scotch traditional conservatism, that he will not spare even Charles Edward—of whom he draws so graceful a picture—the humiliation of submitting to old Bradwardine’s “solemn act of homage,” but makes him go through the absurd ceremony of placing his foot on a cushion to have its brogue unlatched by the dry old enthusiast of heraldic lore. Indeed it was because Scott so much enjoyed the contrast between the high sentiment of life and its dry and often absurd detail, that his imagination found so much freer a vent in the historical romance, than it ever found in the romantic poem. Yet he clearly needed the romantic excitement of picturesque scenes and historical interests, too. I do not think he would ever have gained any brilliant success in the narrower region of the domestic novel. He said himself, in expressing his admiration of Miss Austen, “The big bow-wow strain I can do myself, like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied me.” Indeed he tried it to some extent in *St. Ronan’s Well*, and so far as he tried it, I think he failed. Scott needed a certain largeness of type, a strongly-marked class-life, and, where it was possible, a free, out-of-doors life, for his delineations. No one could paint beggars and gipsies, and wandering fiddlers, and mercenary soldiers, and peasants and farmers and lawyers, and magistrates, and preachers, and courtiers, and statesmen, and best of all perhaps queens and kings, with anything like his ability. But when it came to describing the small differences of manner, differences not due to external habits, so much as to internal sentiment or education, or mere domestic circumstance, he was beyond his proper field. In the sketch of the *St. Ronan’s Spa* and the company at the *table-d’hôte*, he is of-course somewhere near the mark,—he was too able a man to fall far short of success in anything he really gave to the world; but it is not interesting. Miss Austen would have made Lady Penelope Penfeather a hundred times as



amusing. We turn to Meg Dods and Touchwood, and Cargill, and Captain Jekyl, and Sir Bingo Binks, and to Clara Mowbray—i. e., to the lives really moulded by large and specific causes, for enjoyment, and leave the small gossip of the company at the Wells as, relatively at least, a failure. And it is well for all the world that it was so. The domestic novel, when really of the highest kind, is no doubt a perfect work of art, and an unfailing source of amusement; but it has nothing of the tonic influence, the large instructiveness, the stimulating intellectual air, of Scott's historic tales. Even when Scott is farthest from reality—as in *Ivanhoe* or *The Monastery*—he makes you open your eyes to all sorts of historical conditions to which you would otherwise be blind. The domestic novel, even when its art is perfect, gives little but pleasure at the best; at the worst it is simply scandal idealized.

Scott often confessed his contempt for his own heroes. He said of Edward Waverley, for instance, that he was “a sneaking piece of imbecility,” and that “if he had married Flora, she would have set him up upon the chimney-piece as Count Borowlaski's wife used to do with him. I am a bad hand at depicting a hero; properly so called, and have an unfortunate propensity for the dubious characters of borderers, buccaneers, highland robbers, and all others of a Robin-Hood description.”\* In another letter he says, “My rogue always, in despite of me, turns out my hero.”† And it seems very likely that in most of the situations Scott describes so well, his own course would have been that of his wilder impulses, and not that of his reason. Assuredly he would never have stopped hesitating on the line between opposite courses as his Waverleys, his Mortons, his Osbaldistones do. Whenever he was really involved in a party strife, he flung prudence and impartiality to the winds, and went in like the hearty partisan which his strong impulses made of him. But granting this, I do not agree with his condemnation of all his own colourless heroes. However much they differed in nature from Scott himself, the even balance of their reason against their sympathies is certainly well conceived, is in itself natural, and is an admirable expedient for effecting that which was probably its real use to Scott,—the affording an opportunity for the delineation of all the pros and cons of the case, so that the characters on both sides of the struggle should be properly understood. Scott's imagination was clearly far wider—was far more permeated with the fixed air of sound judgment—than his practical impulses. He needed a machinery for displaying his insight into both sides of a public quarrel, and his colourless heroes gave him the instrument he needed. Both in Morton's case (in *Old Mortality*), and in Waverley's, the hesitation is certainly well described. Indeed in relation to the

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 175-6.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 46.

controversy between Covenanters and Royalists, while his political and martial prepossessions went with Claverhouse, his reason and educated moral feeling certainly were clearly identified with Morton.

It is, however, obviously true that Scott's heroes are mostly created for the sake of the facility they give in delineating the other characters, and not the other characters for the sake of the heroes. They are the imaginative neutral ground, as it were, on which opposing influences are brought to play; and what Scott best loved to paint was those who, whether by nature, by inheritance, or by choice, had become unique and characteristic types of one-sided feeling, not those who were merely in process of growth, and had not ranged themselves at all. Mr. Carlyle, who, as I have said before, places Scott's romances far below their real level, maintains that these great types of his are drawn from the outside, and not made actually to live. "His Bailie Jarvies, Dinmonts, Dalgettys (for their name is legion), do look and talk like what they give themselves out for; they are, if not *created* and made poetically alive, yet deceptively *enacted* as a good player might do them. What more is wanted, then? For the reader lying on a sofa, nothing more; yet for another sort of reader much. It were a long chapter to unfold the difference in drawing a character between a Scott and a Shakespeare or Goethe. Yet it is a difference literally immense; they are of a different species; the value of the one is not to be counted in the coin of the other. We might say in a short word, which covers a long matter, that our Shakespeare fashions his characters from the heart outwards; your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them. The one set become living men and women; the other amount to little more than mechanical cases, deceptively painted automaton."\* And then he goes on to contrast Fenella in *Peveril of the Peak* with Goethe's Mignon. Mr. Carlyle could hardly have chosen a less fair comparison. If Goethe is to be judged by his women, let Scott be judged by his men. So judged, I think Scott will, as a painter of character—of course, I am not now speaking of him as a poet,—come out far above Goethe. Excepting the hero of his first drama (*Götz of the iron hand*), which by the way was so much in Scott's line that his first essay in poetry was to translate it—not very well—I doubt if Goethe was ever successful with his pictures of men. *Wilhelm Meister* is, as Niebuhr truly said, "a ménagerie of tame animals." Doubtless Goethe's women—certainly his women of culture—are more truly and inwardly conceived and created than Scott's. Except Jeanie Deans and Madge Wildfire, and perhaps Lucy Ashton, Scott's women are apt to be uninteresting, either pink and white toys, or hardish women of the world. But then no one can compare the men of the two writers, and not see Scott's vast pre-eminence on that side.

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\* Carlyle's *Miscellaneous Essays*, iv. 174-5.

I think the deficiency of his picture of women, odd as it seems to say so, should be greatly attributed to his natural chivalry. His conception of women of his own or a higher class was always too romantic. He hardly ventured, as it were, in his tenderness for them, to look deeply into their little weaknesses and intricacies of character. With women of an inferior class, he had not this feeling. Nothing can be more perfect than the manner in which he blends the dairy-woman and woman of business in Jeanie Deans, with the lover and the sister. But once make a woman beautiful, or in any way an object of homage to him, and Scott bowed so low before the image of her, that he could not go deep into her heart. He could no more have analyzed such a woman, as Thackeray analyzed Lady Castlewood, or Amelia, or Becky, or as George Elliot analyzed Rosamond Vincy, than he could have vivisected Camp or Maida. To some extent, therefore, Scott's pictures of women remain something in the style of the miniatures of the last age—bright and beautiful beings without any special character in them. He was dazzled by a fair heroine. He could not take them up into his imagination as real beings as he did men. But then how living are his men, whether coarse or noble! What a picture, for instance, is that in *A Legend of Montrose* of the conceited, pragmatic, but prompt and dauntless soldier of fortune, rejecting Argyle's attempts to tamper with him, in the dungeon at Inverary, suddenly throwing himself on the disguised Duke so soon as he detects him by his voice, and wresting from him the means of his own liberation! Who could read that scene and say for a moment that Dalgetty is painted "from the skin inwards"? It was just Scott himself breathing his own life through the habits of a good specimen of the mercenary soldier—realizing where the spirit of hire would end, and the sense of honour would begin—and preferring, even in a dungeon, the audacious policy of a sudden attack to that of crafty negotiation. What a picture (and a very different one) again is that in *Redgauntlet* of Peter Peebles, the mad litigant, with face emaciated by poverty and anxiety, and rendered wild by "an insane lightness about the eyes," dashing into the English magistrate's court for a warrant against his fugitive counsel. Or, to take a third instance, as different as possible from either, how powerfully conceived is the situation in *Old Mortality*, where Balfour of Burley, in his fanatic fury at the defeat of his plan for a new rebellion, pushes the oak-tree, which connects his wild retreat with the outer world, into the stream, and tries to slay Morton for opposing him. In such scenes and a hundred others—for these are mere random examples—Scott undoubtedly painted his masculine figures from as deep and inward a conception of the character of the situation as Goethe ever attained, even in drawing Mignon, or Klärchen, or Gretchen. The distinction has no real existence. Goethe's pictures of women were no doubt the intuitions of genius; and so are



Scott's of men—and here and there of his women too. Professional women he can always paint with power. Meg Dods, the innkeeper, Meg Merrilies, the gipsy, Mauser Headrigg, the Covenanter, Elspeth, the old fishwife in *The Antiquary*, and the old crones employed to nurse and watch, and lay out the corpse, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, are all in their way impressive figures.

And even in relation to women of a rank more fascinating to Scott, and whose inner character was perhaps on that account less familiar to his imagination, grant him but a few hints from history, and he draws a picture which, for vividness and brilliancy, may almost compare with Shakespeare's own studies in English history. Had Shakespeare painted the scene in *The Abbot*, in which Mary Stuart commands one of her Marys in waiting to tell her at what bridal she last danced, and Mary Fleming blurts out the reference to the marriage of Sebastian at Holyrood, would any one hesitate to regard it as a stroke of genius worthy of the great dramatist? This picture of the Queen's mind suddenly thrown off its balance, and betraying, in the agony of the moment, the fear and remorse which every association with Darnley conjured up, is painted "from the heart outwards," not "from the skin inwards," if ever there were such a painting in the world. Scott hardly ever failed in painting kings or peasants, queens or peasant-women. There was something in the well-marked type of both to catch his imagination, which can always hit off the grander features of royalty and the homelier features of laborious humility. Is there any sketch traced in lines of more sweeping grandeur and more impressive force than the following of Mary Stuart's lucid interval of remorse—lucid compared with her ordinary mood, though it was of a remorse that was almost delirious—which breaks in upon her hour of fascinating condescension?—

"Are they not a lovely couple, my Fleming? and is it not heart-rending to think that I must be their ruin?"

"Not so," said Roland Græme, 'it is we, gracious sovereign, who will be your deliverers.' '*Exoribus parvulorum!*' said the queen, looking upward; 'if it is by the mouth of these children that heaven calls me to resume the stately thoughts which become my birth and my rights, thou wilt grant them thy protection, and to me the power of rewarding their zeal.' Then turning to Fleming, she instantly added, 'Thou knowest, my friend, whether to make those who have served me happy, was not ever Mary's favourite pastime. When I have been rebuked by the stern preachers of the Calvinistic heresy—when I have seen the fierce countenances of my nobles averted from me, has it not been because I mixed in the harmless pleasures of the young and gay, and rather for the sake of their happiness than my own, have mingled in the masque, the song or the dance, with the youth of my household? Well, I repeat not of it—though Knox termed it sin, and Morton degradation—I was happy because I saw happiness around me: and woe betide the wretched jealousy that can extract guilt out of the overflowings of an unguarded gaiety!—Fleming, if we are restored to our throne, shall we not have one blithesome day at a blithesome bridal, of which we must now name neither the bride nor the bridegroom? But that bridegroom shall have the barony of Blairgowrie, a fair gift even for a queen to give, and that bride's chaplet shall be twined with the fairest pearls that ever were found in the depths of Lochlomond; and thou thyself, Mary

Fleming, the best dresser of tresses that ever busked the tresses of a queen, and who would scorn to touch those of any woman of lower rank—thou thyself shalt for my love twine them into the bride's tresses—Look, my Fleming, suppose then such clustered locks as these of our Catherine, they would not put shame upon thy skill.' So saying she passed her hand fondly over the head of her youthful favourite, while her more aged attendant replied despondently, 'Alas, madam, your thoughts stray far from home.' 'They do, my Fleming,' said the queen, 'but is it well or kind in you to call them back?—God knows they have kept the perch this night but too closely.—Come, I will recall the gay vision, were it but to punish them. Yes, at that blithesome bridal, Mary herself shall forget the weight of sorrows, and the toil of state, and herself once more lead a measure.—At whose wedding was it that we last danced, my Fleming? I think care has troubled my memory—yet something of it I should remember; canst thou not aid me? I know thou canst.' 'Alas, madam,' replied the lady. 'What,' said Mary, 'wilt thou not help us so far? this is a peevish adherence to thine own graver opinion which holds our talk as folly. But thou art court-bred and wilt well understand me when I say the queen *commands* Lady Fleming to tell her when she led the last *branle*.' With a face deadly pale and a mien as if she were about to sink into the earth, the court-bred dame, no longer daring to refuse obedience, faltered out, 'Gracious lady—if my memory err not—it was at a masque in Holyrood—at the marriage of Sebastian.' The unhappy queen, who had hitherto listened with a melancholy smile, provoked by the reluctance with which the Lady Fleming brought out her story, at this ill-fated word interrupted her with a shriek so wild and loud that the vaulted apartment rang, and both Roland and Catherine sprung to their feet in the utmost terror and alarm. Meantime, Mary seemed, by the train of horrible ideas thus suddenly excited, surprised not only beyond self-command, but for the moment beyond the verge of reason. 'Traitoress,' she said to the Lady Fleming, 'thou wouldst slay thy sovereign. Call my French guards—*à moi! à moi! mes Français!*—I am beset with traitors in mine own palace—they have murdered my husband—Rescue! Rescue! for the Queen of Scotland!' She started up from her chair—her features late so exquisitely lovely in their paleness, now inflamed with the fury of frenzy, and resembling those of a Bellona. 'We will take the field ourself,' she said; 'warn the city—warn Lothian and Fife—saddle our Spanish barb, and bid French Paris see our petronel be charged. Better to die at the head of our brave Scotsmen, like our grandfather at Flodden, than of a broken heart like our ill-starred father.' 'Be patient—be composed, dearest sovereign,' said Catherine; and then addressing Lady Fleming angrily, she added, 'How could you say aught that reminded her of her husband?' The word reached the ear of the unhappy princess, who caught it up, speaking with great rapidity, 'Husband!—what husband? Not his most Christian Majesty—he is ill at ease—he cannot mount on horseback—not him of the Lennox—but it was the Duke of Orkney thou wouldst say?' 'For God's love, madam, be patient!' said the Lady Fleming. But the queen's excited imagination could by no entreaty be diverted from its course. 'Bid him come hither to our aid,' she said, 'and bring with him his lambs, as he calls them—Bowton, Hay of Tallia, Black Ormiston and his kinsman Hob—Fie, how swart they are, and how they smell of sulphur! What! closeted with Morton? Nay, if the Douglas and the Hepburn ha' the complot to'ether, the bird when it breaks the shell will scare Scotland, will it not, my Fleming?' 'She grows wilder and wilder,' said Fleming. 'We have too many hearers for these strange words.' 'Roland,' said Catherine, 'in the name of God begone!—you cannot aid us here—leave us to deal with her alone—away—away!'

And equally fine is the scene in *Kenilworth* in which Elizabeth undertakes the reconciliation of the haughty rivals, Sussex and Leicester, unaware that in the course of the audience she herself will have to bear a great strain on her self-command, both in her feelings as a queen and her feelings as a lover. Her grand rebukes to both, her ill-concealed preference for Leicester, her whispered ridicule of Sussex, the impulses of tenderness which she stifles, the flashes of re-

sentment to which she gives way, the triumph of policy over private feeling, her imperious impatience when she is baffled, her jealousy as she grows suspicious of a personal rival, her gratified pride and vanity when the suspicion is exchanged for the clear evidence, as she supposes, of Leicester's love, and her peremptory conclusion of the audience, bring before the mind a series of pictures far more vivid and impressive than the greatest of historical painters could fix on canvas, even at the cost of the labour of years. Even more brilliant, though not so sustained and difficult an effort of genius, is the later scene in the same story, in which Elizabeth drags the unhappy Countess of Leicester from her concealment in one of the grottoes of Kenilworth Castle, and strides off with her, in a fit of vindictive humiliation and Amazonian fury, to confront her with her husband. But this last scene no doubt is more in Scott's way. He can always paint women in their more masculine moods. Where he frequently fails is in the attempt to indicate the finer shades of women's nature. In Amy Robsart herself, for example, he is by no means generally successful, though in an early scene her childish delight in the various orders and decorations of her husband is painted with much freshness and delicacy. But wherever, as in the case of queens, Scott can get a telling hint from actual history, he can always so use it as to make history itself seem dim to the equivalent for it which he gives us.

And yet, as every one knows, Scott was excessively free in his manipulations of history for the purposes of romance. In *Kenilworth* he represents Shakespeare's plays as already in the mouths of courtiers and statesmen, though he lays the scene in the eighteenth year of Elizabeth, when Shakespeare was hardly old enough to rob an orchard. In *Woodstock*, on the contrary, he insists, if you compare Sir Henry Lee's dates with the facts, that Shakespeare died twenty years at least before he actually died. The historical basis, again, of *Woodstock* and of *Redgauntlet* is thoroughly untrustworthy, and about all the minuter details of history,—unless so far as they were characteristic of the age,—I do not suppose that Scott in his romances ever troubled himself at all. And yet few historians—not even Scott himself when he exchanged romance for history—ever drew the great figures of history with so powerful a hand. In writing history and biography Scott has little or no advantage over very inferior men. His pictures of Swift, of Dryden, of Napoleon, are in no way very vivid. It is only where he is working from the pure imagination,—though imagination stirred by historic study,—that he paints a picture which follows us about, as if with living eyes, instead of creating for us a mere series of lines and colours. Indeed, whether Scott draws truly or falsely, he draws with such genius that his pictures of Richard and Saladin, of Louis XI. and Charles the Bold, of Margaret of Anjou and René of Provence, of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth



Tudor, of Sussex and of Leicester, of James and Charles and Buckingham, of the two Dukes of Argyle—the Argyle of the time of the revolution, and the Argyle of George II.,—of Queen Caroline, of Claverhouse, and Monmouth, and of Rob Roy, will live in English literature beside Shakespeare's pictures—probably less faithful if more imaginative—of John and Richard and the later Henries, and all the great figures by whom they were surrounded. No historical portrait that we possess will take precedence—as a mere portrait—of Scott's brilliant study of James I. in *The Fortunes of Nigel*. Take this illustration for instance, where George Heriot the goldsmith (Jingling Geordie, as the King familiarly calls him) has just been speaking of Lord Huntinglen, as “a man of the old rough world that will drink and swear :”—

“ ‘O Geordie !’ exclaimed the king, ‘these are auld-warld frailties, of whilk we dare not pronounce even ourselves absolutely free. But the world grows worse from day to day, Geordie. The juveniles of this age may weel say with the poet,—

“Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit  
Nos nequiores—”

This Dalgarno does not drink so much, aye, or swear so much, as his father, but he wenches, Geordie, and he breaks his word and oath baith. As to what ye say of the leddy and the ministers, we are all fallible creatures, Geordie, priests and kings as weel as others ; and wha kens but what that may account for the difference between this Dalgarno and his father ? The earl is the vera soul of honour, and cares nae mair for warld's gear than a noble hound for the quest of a foulmart ; but as for his son, he was like to brazen us all out—ourselves, Steenie, Baby Charles, and our Council, till he heard of the tocher, and then by my kingly crown he lap like a cock at a grossart ! These are discrepancies betwixt parent and son not to be accounted for naturally, according to Baptista Porta, Michael Scott *de secretis*, and others. Ah, Jingling Geordie, if your clouting the caldron, and jingling on pots, pans, and veshels of all manner of metal, hadna jingled a' your grammar out of your head, I could have touched on that matter to you at mair length.' . . . Heriot inquired whether Lord Dalgarno had consented to do the Lady Hermione justice. ‘Troth, man, I have small doubt that he will,’ quoth the king, ‘I gave him the schedule of her worldly substance, which you delivered to us in the council, and we allowed him half an hour to chew the cud upon that. It is rare reading for bringing him to reason. I left Baby Charles and Steenie laying his duty before him, and if he can resist doing what *they* desire him, why I wish he would teach *me* the gate of it. O Geordie, Jingling Geordie, it was grand to hear Baby Charles laying down the guilt of dissimulation, and Steenie lecturing on the turpitude of incontinence.’ ‘I am afraid,’ said George Heriot, more hastily than prudently, ‘I might have thought of the old proverb of Satan reproving sin.’ ‘Deil hae our soul, neighbour,’ said the king, reddening, ‘but ye are not blate ! I gie ye licence to speak freely, and by our saul, ye do not let the privilege become lost, *non utendo*—it will suffer no negative prescription in your hands. Is it fit, think ye, that Baby Charles should let his thoughts be publicly seen ? No, no, princes' thoughts are *arcana imperii* : *quì nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare*. Every liege subject is bound to speak the whole truth to the king, but there is nae reciprocity of obligation—and for Steenie having been whiles a dike-louper at a time, is it for you, who are his goldsmith, and to whom, I doubt, he awes an uncomatable sum, to cast that up to him ?’

Assuredly there is no undue favouring of Stuarts in such a picture as that.

Scott's humour is, I think, of very different qualities in relation to different subjects. Certainly he was at times capable of considerable heaviness of hand,—of the Scotch “wut” which has been so irreverently treated by English critics. His rather elaborate jocular introductions, under the name of Jedediah Cleishbotham, are clearly laborious at times. And even his own letters to his daughter-in-law, which Mr. Lockhart seems to regard as models of tender playfulness and pleasantry, seem to me decidedly elephantine. Not unfrequently, too, his stereotyped jokes weary. Dalgetty bores you almost as much as he would do in real life,—which is a great fault in art. Bradwardine becomes a nuisance, and as for Sir Piercie Shafton, he is beyond endurance. Like some other Scotchmen of genius, Scott twanged away at any effective chord till it more than lost its expressiveness. But in dry humour, and in that higher humour which skilfully blends the ludicrous and the pathetic, so that it is hardly possible to separate between smiles and tears, Scott is a master. His canny innkeeper, who, having, sent away all the peasemeal to the camp of the Covenanters, and all the oatmeal (with deep professions of duty) to the castle and its cavaliers, in compliance with the requisitions sent to him on each side, admits with a sigh to his daughter that “they maun gar wheat flour serve themsels for a blink,”—his firm of solicitors, Greenhorn and Grinderson, whose senior partner writes respectfully to clients in prosperity, and whose junior partner writes familiarly to those in adversity,—his arbitrary nabob who asks how the devil any one should be able to mix spices so well “as one who has been where they grow;”—his little ragamuffin who indignantly denies that he has broken his promise not to gamble away his sixpences at pitch-and-toss because he has gambled them away at “neevie-neevie-nick-nack,”—and similar figures abound in his tales,—are all creations which make one laugh inwardly as we read. But he has a much higher humour still, that inimitable power of shading off ignorance into knowledge and simplicity into wisdom, which makes his picture of Jeanie Deans, for instance, so humorous as well as so affecting. When Jeanie reunites her father to her husband by reminding the former how it would sometimes happen that “twa precious saints might pu’ sundrywise like twa cows riving at the same hay-band,” she gives us an admirable instance of Scott’s higher humour. Or take Jeanie Dean’s letter to her father communicating to him the pardon of his daughter and her own interview with the Queen :—

“DEAREST AND TRULY HONOURED FATHER—This comes with my duty to inform you that it has pleased God to redeem that captivitie of my poor sister, in respect the Queen’s blessed Majesty, for whom we are ever bound to pray, hath redeemed her soul from the slayer, granting the ransom of her, whilk is ane pardon or reprieve. And I spoke with the Queen face to face, and yet live : for she is not muckle differing from other grand leddies, saving that she has a stately presence, and een like a blue huntin’ hawk’s, whilk gaed throu’ and throu’ me like a Highland durk—And all this good was, alway under the Great Giver, to whom all

are but instruments, wrought for us by the Duk of Argile, wha is ane native true-hearted Scotsman, and not pridefu' like other folk we ken of—and likewise skeely enow in bestial, whereof he has promised to gie me twa Devonshire kye, of which he is enamoured, although I do still haud by the real hawkit Airshire breed—and I have promised him a cheese; and I wad wuss ye if Gowans, the brockit cow, has a quey, that she suld suck her fill of milk, as I am given to understand he has none of that breed, and is not scornfu' but will take a thing frae a pur body, that it may lighten their heart of the loading of debt that they awe him. Also his honour the Duke will accept ane of our Dunlop cheeses, and it sall be my faut if a better was ever yearned in Lowden.”—[Here follow some observations respecting the breed of cattle, and the produce of the dairy, which it is our intention to forward to the Board of Agriculture.]—“Nevertheless, these are but matters of the after-harvest, in respect of the great good which Providence has gifted us with—and, in especial, poor Effie's life. And oh, my d ar father, since it hath pleased God to be merciful to her, let her not want your free pardon, whilk will make her meet to be ane vessel of grace, and also a comfort to your ane graie hairs. Dear Father, will ye let the Laird ken that we have had friends strangely raised up to us, and that the talent whilk he lent me will be thankfully repaid. I hae some of it to the fore; and the rest of it is not knotted up in ane purse or napkin, but in ane wee bit paper, as is the fashion heir, whilk I am assured is gude for the siller. And, dear father, through Mr. Butler's means I hae gude friendship with the Duke, for there had been kindness between their forbears in the auld troublesome time byepast. And Mrs. Glass has been kind like my very mother. She has a braw house here, and lives bien and warm, wi' twa servant lasses, and a man and a callant in the shop. And she is to send you doun a pound of her hiedried, and some other tobaka, and we maun think of some propine for her, since her kindness hath been great. And the Duk is to send the pardon doun by an express messenger, in respect that I canna travel sae fast; and I am to come doun wi' twa of his Honour's servants—that is, John Archibald, a decent and elderly gentleman, that says he has seen you lang syne, when ye were buying beasts in the west frae the Laird of Aughtermuggitie—but maybe ye winna mind him—ony way, he's a civil man—and Mrs. Dolly Dutton, that is to be dairy-maid at Inverara. and they bring me on as far as Glasgo', whilk will make it nae pinch to win hame, whilk I desire of all things. May the Giver of all good things keep ye in your outgauns and incomings, whereof devoutly prayeth your loving dauter,  
“JEAN DEANS.”

This contains an example of Scott's rather heavy jocularity as well as giving us a fine illustration of his highest and deepest and sunniest humour. Coming where it does, the joke inserted about the Board of Agriculture is rather like the gambol of a rhinoceros trying to imitate the curvettings of a thoroughbred horse.

Some of the finest touches of his humour are no doubt much heightened by his perfect command of the genius as well as the dialect of a peasantry, in whom a true culture of mind and sometimes also of heart is found in the closest possible contact with the humblest pursuits and the quaintest enthusiasm for them. But Scott, with all his turn for irony—and Mr. Lockhart says that even on his death-bed he used towards his children the same sort of good-humoured irony to which he had always accustomed them in his life—certainly never gives us any example of that highest irony which is found so frequently in Shakespeare, which touches the paradoxes of the spiritual life of the children of earth, and which reached its highest point in Isaiah. Now and then in his latest diaries—the diaries written in his deep affliction—he comes near the edge of it. Once, for instance, he



says, "What a strange scene if the surge of conversation could suddenly ebb like the tide, and show us the state of people's real minds !

'No eyes the rocks discover,  
Which lurk beneath the deep.'

Life could not be endured were it seen in reality." But this is not irony, only the sort of meditation which, in a mind inclined to thrust deep into the secrets of life's paradoxes, is apt to lead to irony. Scott, however, does not thrust deep in this direction. He met the cold steel which inflicts the deepest interior wounds, like a soldier, and never seems to have meditated on the higher paradoxes of life till reason reeled. The irony of Hamlet is far from Scott. His imagination was essentially one of distinct embodiment. He never even seemed so much as to contemplate that sundering of substance and form, that rending away of outward garments, that unclothing of the soul, in order that it might be more effectually clothed upon, which is at the heart of anything that may be called spiritual irony. The constant abiding of his mind within the well defined forms of some one or other of the conditions of outward life and manners, among the scores of different spheres of human habit, was, no doubt, one of the secrets of his genius ; but it was also its greatest limitation.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### MORALITY AND RELIGION.

THE very same causes which limited Scott's humour and irony to the commoner fields of experience, and prevented him from ever introducing into his stories characters of the highest type of moral thoughtfulness, gave to his own morality and religion, which were, I think, true to the core so far as they went, a shade of distinct conventionality. It is no doubt quite true, as he himself tells us, that he took more interest in his mercenaries and moss-troopers, outlaws, gipsies, and beggars, than he did in the fine ladies and gentlemen under a cloud whom he adopted as heroines and heroes. But that was the very sign of his conventionalism. Though he interested himself more in these irregular persons, he hardly ever ventured to paint their inner life so as to show how little there was to choose between the sins of those who are at war with society and the sins of those who bend to the yoke of society. He widened rather than narrowed the chasm between the outlaw and the respectable citizen, even while he did not disguise his own romantic interest in the former. He extenuated, no

doubt, the sins of all brave and violent defiers of the law, as distinguished from the sins of crafty and cunning abusers of the law. But the leaning he had to the former was, as he was willing to admit, what he regarded as a "naughty" leaning. He did not attempt for a moment to balance accounts between them and society. He paid his tribute as a matter of course to the established morality, and only put in a word or two by way of attempt to diminish the severity of the sentence on the bold transgressor. And then, where what is called the "law of honour" comes in to traverse the law of religion, he had no scruple in setting aside the latter in favour of the customs of gentlemen, without any attempt to justify that course. Yet it is evident from various passages in his writings that he held Christian duty inconsistent with duelling, and that he held himself a sincere Christian. In spite of this, when he was fifty-six, and under no conceivable hurry or perturbation of feeling, but only concerned to defend his own conduct—which was indeed plainly right—as to a political disclosure which he had made in his life of Napoleon, he asked his old friend William Clerk to be his second, if the expected challenge from General Gourgaud should come, and declared his firm intention of accepting it. On the strength of official evidence he had exposed some conduct of General Gourgaud's at St. Helena, which appeared to be far from honourable, and he thought it his duty on that account to submit to be shot at by General Gourgaud, if General Gourgaud had wished it. In writing to William Clerk to ask him to be his second, he says, "Like a man who finds himself in a scrape, General Gourgaud may wish to fight himself out of it, and if the quarrel should be thrust on me, why, *I will not baulk him, Jackie*. He shall not dishonour the country through my sides, I can assure him." In other words, Scott acted just as he had made Waverley and others of his heroes act, on a code of honour which he knew to be false, and he must have felt in this case to be something worse. He thought himself at that time under the most stringent obligations both to his creditors and his children, to do all in his power to redeem himself and his estate from debt. Nay, more, he held that his life was a trust from his Creator, which he had no right to throw away merely because a man whom he had not really injured was indulging a strong wish to injure him; but he could so little brook the imputation of physical cowardice, that he was moral coward enough to resolve to meet General Gourgaud, if General Gourgaud lusted after a shot at him. Nor is there any trace preserved of so much as a moral scruple in his own mind on the subject, and this though there are clear traces in his other writings as to what he thought Christian morality required. But the Border chivalry was so strong in Scott that, on subjects of this kind at least, his morality was the conventional morality of a day rapidly passing away.

He showed the same conventional feeling in his severity towards

one of his own brothers who had been guilty of cowardice. Daniel Scott was the black sheep of the family. He got into difficulties in business, formed a bad connexion with an artful woman, and was sent to try his fortunes in the West Indies. There he was employed in some service against a body of refractory negroes—we do not know its exact nature—and apparently showed the white feather. Mr. Lockhart says that “he returned to Scotland a dishonoured man; and though he found shelter and compassion from his mother, his brother would never see him again. Nay, when, soon after, his health, shattered by dissolute indulgence, . . . gave way altogether, and he died, as yet a young man, the poet refused either to attend his funeral or to wear mourning for him, like the rest of the family.”\* Indeed he always spoke of him as his “relative,” not as his brother. Here again Scott’s severity was due to his brother’s failure as a “man of honour,” i. e. in courage. He was forbearing enough with vices of a different kind; made John Ballantyne’s dissipation the object rather of his jokes than of his indignation; and not only mourned for him, but really grieved for him when he died. It is only fair to say, however, that for this conventional scorn of a weakness rather than a sin, Scott sorrowed sincerely later in life, and that in sketching the physical cowardice of Connachar in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, he deliberately made an attempt to atone for this hardness towards his brother by showing how frequently the foundation of cowardice may be laid in perfectly involuntary physical temperament, and pointing out with what noble elements of disposition it may be combined. But till reflection on many forms of human character had enlarged Scott’s charity, and perhaps also the range of his speculative ethics, he remained a conventional moralist, and one, moreover, the type of whose conventional code was borrowed more from that of honour than from that of religious principle. There is one curious passage in his diary, written very near the end of his life, in which Scott even seems to declare that conventional standards of conduct are better, or at least safer, than religious standards of conduct. He says in his diary for the 15th April, 1828,—“Dined with Sir Robert Inglis, and met Sir Thomas Acland, my old and kind friend. I was happy to see him. He may be considered now as the head of the religious party in the House of Commons—a powerful body which Wilberforce long commanded. It is a difficult situation, for the adaptation of religious motives to earthly policy is apt—among the infinite delusions of the human heart—to be a snare.”† His letters to his eldest son, the young cavalry officer, on his first start in life, are much admired by Mr. Lockhart, but to me they read a little hard, a little worldly, and extremely conventional. Conventionality was certainly to his mind almost a virtue.

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\* Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, iii. 193-9.

† Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, ix. 231.



Of enthusiasm in religion Scott always spoke very severely, both in his novels and in his letters and private diary. In writing to Lord Montague, he speaks of such enthusiasm as was then prevalent at Oxford, and which makes, he says, "religion a motive and a pretext for particular lines of thinking in politics and in temporal affairs" [as if it could help doing that!] as "teaching a new way of going to the devil for God's sake," and this expressly, because when the young are infected with it, it disunites families, and sets "children in opposition to their parents."\* He gives us, however, one reason for his dread of anything like enthusiasm, which is not conventional;—that it interferes with the submissive and tranquil mood which is the only true religious mood. Speaking in his diary of a weakness and fluttering at the heart, from which he had suffered, he says, "It is an awful sensation, and would have made an enthusiast of me, had I indulged my imagination on religious subjects. I have been always careful to place my mind in the most tranquil posture which it can assume, during my private exercises of devotion."† And in this avoidance of indulging the imagination on religious, or even spiritual subjects, Scott goes far beyond Shakespeare. I do not think there is a single study in all his romances of what may be fairly called a pre-eminently spiritual character as such, though Jeanie Deans approaches nearest to it. The same may be said of Shakespeare. But Shakespeare, though he has never drawn a pre-eminently spiritual character, often enough indulged his imagination while meditating on spiritual themes.

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## CHAPTER XII

### DISTRACTIONS AND AMUSEMENTS AT ABBOTSFORD.

BETWEEN 1814 and the end of 1825, Scott's literary labour was interrupted only by one serious illness, and hardly interrupted by that,—by a few journeys,—one to Paris after the battle of Waterloo, and several to London,—and by the worry of a constant stream of intrusive visitors. Of his journeys he has left some records; but I cannot say that I think Scott would ever have reached, as a mere observer and recorder, at all the high point which he reached directly his imagination went to work to create a story. That imagination was, indeed, far less subservient to his mere perceptions than to his constructive powers. *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*—the records of his Paris journey after Waterloo for instance—are not at all above the mark of a good special correspondent. His imagination was less the

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\*Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 255-6.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 292.

imagination of insight, than the imagination of one whose mind was a great kaleidoscope of human life and fortunes. But far more interrupting than either illness or travel, was the lion-hunting of which Scott became the object, directly after the publication of the earlier novels. In great measure, no doubt, on account of the mystery as to his authorship, his fame became something oppressive. At one time as many as *sixteen* parties of visitors applied to see Abbotsford in a single day. Strangers,—especially the American travellers of that day, who were much less reticent and more irrepressible than the American travellers of this,—would come to him without introductions, facetiously cry out “Prodigious!” in imitation of Dominie Sampson, whatever they were shown, inquire whether the new house was called Tullyveolan or Tillytudlem, cross-examine, with open note-books, as to Scott’s age, and the age of his wife, and appear to be taken quite by surprise when they were bowed out without being asked to dine.\* In those days of high postage Scott’s bill for letters “seldom came under 150*l.* a year,” and “as to coach parcels, they were a perfect ruination.” On one occasion a mighty package came by post from the United States, for which Scott had to pay five pounds sterling. It contained a MS. play called *The Cherokee Lovers*, by a young lady of New York, who begged Scott to read and correct it, write a prologue and epilogue, get it put on the stage at Drury Lane, and negotiate with Constable or Murray for the copyright. In about a fortnight another package not less formidable arrived, charged with a similar postage, which Scott, not grown cautious through experience, recklessly opened; out jumped a duplicate copy of *The Cherokee Lovers*, with a second letter from the authoress, stating that as the weather had been stormy, and she feared that something might have happened to her former MS., she had thought it prudent to send him a duplicate.† Of course, when fame reached such a point as this, it became both a worry and a serious waste of money, and what was far more valuable than money, of time, privacy, and tranquillity of mind. And though no man ever bore such worries with the equanimity of Scott, no man ever received less pleasure from the adulation of unknown and often vulgar and ignorant admirers. His real amusements were his trees and his friends. “Planting and pruning trees,” he said, “I could work at from morning to night. There is a sort of self-congratulation, a little tickling self-flattery, in the idea that while you are pleasing and amusing yourself, you are seriously contributing to the future welfare of the country, and that your very acorn may send its future ribs of oak to future victories like Trafalgar,” ‡—for the day of iron ships was not yet. And again,

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\* Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, v. 387.

† Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, v. 382.

‡ Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, iii. 288.

at a later stage of his planting :—" You can have no idea of the exquisite delight of a planter,—he is like a painter laying on his colours,—at every moment he sees his effects coming out. There is no art or occupation comparable to this ; it is full of past, present and future enjoyment. I look back to the time when there was not a tree here, only bare heath ; I look round and see thousands of trees growing up, all of which, I may say almost each of which, have received my personal attention. I remember, five years ago, looking forward with the most delighted expectation to this very hour, and as each year has passed, the expectation has gone on increasing. I do the same now. I anticipate what this plantation and that one will presently be, if only taken care of, and there is not a spot of which I do not watch the progress. Unlike building, or even painting, or indeed any other kind of pursuit, this has no end, and is never interrupted ; but goes on from day to day, and from year to year, with a perpetually augmenting interest. Farming I hate. What have I to do with fattening and killing beasts, or raising corn, only to cut it down, and to wrangle with farmers about prices, and to be constantly at the mercy of the seasons? There can be no such disappointments or annoyances in planting trees." \* Scott indeed regarded planting as a mode of so moulding the form and colour of the outward world, that nature herself became indebted to him for finer outlines, richer masses of colour, and deeper shadows, as well as for more fertile and sheltered soils. And he was as skilful in producing the last result, as he was in the artistic effects of his planting. In the essay on the planting of waste lands, he mentions a story,—drawn from his own experience,—of a planter, who having scooped out the lowest part of his land for enclosures, and "planted the wood round them in masses enlarged or contracted as the natural lying of the ground seemed to dictate," met, six years after these changes, his former tenant on the ground, and said to him, "I suppose, Mr. R.—, you will say I have ruined your farm by laying half of it into woodland?" "I should have expected it, sir," answered Mr. R.—, "if you had told me beforehand what you were going to do ; but I am now of a very different opinion ; and as I am looking for land at present, if you are inclined to take for the remaining sixty acres the same rent which I formerly gave for a hundred and twenty, I will give you an offer to that amount. I consider the benefit of the enclosing, and the complete shelter afforded to the fields, as an advantage which fairly counterbalances the loss of one-half of the land." †

And Scott was not only thoughtful in his own planting, but induced his neighbours to become so too. So great was their regard for him, that many of them planted their estates as much with reference to the

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 287-8.

† Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, xxi. 22-3.



effect which their plantations would have on the view from Abbotsford, as with reference to the effect they would have on the view from their own grounds. Many was the consultation which he and his neighbours, Scott of Gala, for instance, and Mr. Henderson of Eildon Hall, had together on the effect which would be produced on the view from their respective houses, of the planting going on upon the lands of each. The reciprocity of feeling was such that the various proprietors acted more like brothers in this matter, than like the jealous and exclusive creatures which landowners, as such, so often are.

Next to his interest in the management and growth of his own little estate was Scott's interest in the management and growth of the Duke of Buccleuch's. To the Duke he looked up as the head of his clan, with something almost more than a feudal attachment, greatly enhanced of course by the personal friendship which he had formed for him in early life as the Earl of Dalkeith. This mixture of feudal and personal feeling towards the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch continued during their lives. Scott was away on a yachting tour to the Shetlands and Orkneys in July and August, 1814, and it was during this absence that the Duchess of Buccleuch died. Scott, who was in no anxiety about her, employed himself in writing an amusing descriptive epistle to the Duke in rough verse, chronicling his voyage, and containing expressions of the profoundest reverence for the goodness and charity of the Duchess, a letter which did not reach its destination till after the Duchess's death. Scott himself heard of her death by chance when they landed for a few hours on the coast of Ireland; he was quite overpowered by the news, and went to bed only to drop into short nightmare sleeps, and to wake with the dim memory of some heavy weight at his heart. The Duke himself died five years later, leaving a son only thirteen years of age (the present Duke), over whose interests, both as regarded his education and his estates, Scott watched as jealously as if they had been those of his own son. Many were the anxious letters he wrote to Lord Montague as to his "young chief's" affairs, as he called them, and great his pride in watching the promise of his youth. Nothing can be clearer than that to Scott the feudal principle was something far beyond a name; that he had at least as much pride in his devotion to the chief, as he had in founding a house which he believed would increase the influence—both territorial and personal—of the clan of Scotts. The unaffected reverence which he felt for the Duke, though mingled with warm personal affection, showed that Scott's feudal feeling had something real and substantial in it, which did not vanish even when it came into close contact with strong personal feelings. This reverence is curiously marked in his letters. He speaks of "the distinction of rank" being ignored by both sides, as of something quite exceptional, but it was never really ignored by him, for though he continued to write to the Duke as an intimate friend, it was with a mingling of awe, very

different indeed from that which he ever adopted to Ellis or Erskine. It is necessary to remember this, not only in estimating the strength of the feeling which made him so anxious to become himself the founder of a house within a house,—of a new branch of the clan of Scotts,—but in estimating the loyalty which Scott always displayed to one of the least respectable of English sovereigns, George IV.,—a matter of which I must now say a few words, not only because it led to Scott's receiving the baronetcy, but because it forms to my mind the most grotesque of all the threads in the lot of this strong and proud man.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### SCOTT AND GEORGE IV.

THE first relations of Scott with the Court were, oddly enough, formed with the Princess, not with the Prince of Wales. In 1806 Scott dined with the Princess of Wales at Blackheath, and spoke of his invitation as a great honour. He wrote a tribute to her father, the Duke of Brunswick, in the introduction to one of the cantos of *Marmion*, and received from the Princess a silver vase in acknowledgment of this passage in the poem. Scott's relations with the Prince Regent seem to have begun in an offer to Scott of the Laureateship in the summer of 1813, an offer which Scott would have found it very difficult to accept, so strongly did his pride revolt at the idea of having to commemorate in verse, as an official duty, all conspicuous incidents affecting the throne. But he was at the time of the offer in the thick of his first difficulties on account of Messrs. John Ballantyne and Co., and it was only the Duke of Buccleuch's guarantee of 4000*l.*—a guarantee subsequently cancelled by Scott's paying the sum for which it was a security—that enabled him at this time to decline what, after Southey had accepted it, he compared in a letter to Southey to the herring for which the poor Scotch clergyman gave thanks in a grace wherein he described it as “even this, the very least of Providence's mercies.” In March, 1815, Scott being then in London, the Prince Regent asked him to dinner, addressed him uniformly as Walter, and struck up a friendship with him which seems to have lasted their lives, and which certainly did much more honour to George than to Sir Walter Scott. It is impossible not to think rather better of George IV. for thus valuing, and doing his best in every way to show his value for, Scott. It is equally impossible not to think rather worse of Scott for thus valuing, and in every way doing his best to express his value for, this very worthless, though by no means incapable king. The consequences were soon seen in the indignation with which Scott began to speak of

the Princess of Wales's sins. In 1806, in the squib he wrote on Lord Melville's acquittal, when impeached for corruption by the Liberal Government, he had written thus of the Princess Caroline :—

“ Our King, too—our Princess,—I dare not say more, sir,—  
 May Providence watch them with mercy and might !  
 While there's one Scottish hand that can wag a claymore, sir,  
 They shall ne'er want a friend to stand up for their right.  
     Be damn'd he that dare not—  
     For my part I'll spare not  
 To beauty afflicted a tribute to give ;  
     Fill it up steadily,  
     Drink it off readily,  
 Here's to the Princess, and long may she live.”

But whoever “ stood up ” for the Princess's right, certainly Scott did not do so after his intimacy with the Prince Regent began. He mentioned her only with severity, and in one letter at least, written to his brother, with something much coarser than severity ;\* but the king's similar vices did not at all alienate him from what at least had all the appearance of a deep personal devotion to his sovereign. The first baronet whom George IV. made on succeeding to the throne, after his long Regency, was Scott, who not only accepted the honour gratefully, but dwelt with extreme pride on the fact that it was offered to him by the king himself, and was in no way due to the prompting of any minister's advice. He wrote to Joanna Baillie on hearing of the Regent's intention—for the offer was made by the Regent at the end of 1818, though it was not actually conferred till after George's accession, namely, on the 30th March, 1820,—“ The Duke of Buccleuch and Scott of Harden, who, as the heads of my clan and the sources of my gentry, are good judges of what I ought to do, have both given me their earnest opinion to accept of an honour directly derived from the source of honour, and neither begged nor bought, as is the usual fashion. Several of my ancestors bore the title in the seventeenth century, and, were it of consequence, I have no reason to be ashamed of the decent and respectable persons who connect me with that period when they carried into the field, like Madoc,

‘ The Crescent at whose gleam the Cambrian oft,  
 Cursing his perilous tenure, wound his horn,’

so that, as a gentleman, I may stand on as good a footing as other new creations.”† Why the honour was any greater for coming from such a king as George, than it would have been if it had been suggested by Lord Sidmouth, or even Lord Liverpool,—or half as great as if Mr. Canning had proposed it, it is not easy to conceive. George

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 229-30.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 13, 14.



was a fair judge of literary merit, but not one to be compared for a moment with that great orator and wit ; and as to his being the fountain of honour, there was so much dishonour of which the king was certainly the fountain too, that I do not think it was very easy for two fountains both springing from such a person to have flowed quite unmingled. George justly prided himself on Sir Walter Scott's having been the first creation of his reign, and I think the event showed that the poet was the fountain of much more honour for the king, than the king was for the poet.

When George came to Edinburgh in 1822, it was Sir Walter who acted virtually as the master of the ceremonies, and to whom it was chiefly due that the visit was so successful. It was then that George clad his substantial person for the first time in the Highland costume—to wit, in the Steuart Tartans—and was so much annoyed to find himself outvied by a wealthy alderman, Sir William Curtis, who had gone and done likewise, and, in his equally grand Steuart Tartans, seemed a kind of parody of the king. The day on which the king arrived, Tuesday, 14th of August, 1822, was also the day on which Scott's most intimate friend, William Erskine, then Lord Kinnedder, died. Yet Scott went on board the royal yacht, was most graciously received by George, had his health drunk by the king in a bottle of Highland whiskey, and with a proper show of devoted loyalty entreated to be allowed to retain the glass out of which his Majesty had just drunk his health. The request was graciously acceded to, but let it be pleaded on Scott's behalf, that on reaching home and finding there his friend Crabbe the poet, he sat down on the royal gift, and crushed it to atoms. One would hope that he was really thinking more even of Crabbe, and much more of Erskine, than of the royal favour for which he had appeared, and doubtless had really believed himself, so grateful. Sir Walter retained his regard for the king, such as it was, to the last, and even persuaded himself that George's death would be a great political calamity for the nation. And really I cannot help thinking that Scott believed more in the king than he did in his friend George Canning. Assuredly, greatly as he admired Canning, he condemned him more and more as Canning grew more liberal, and sometimes speaks of his veerings in that direction with positive asperity. George, on the other hand, who believed more in number one than in any other number, however large, became much more conservative after he became Regent than he was before, and as he grew more conservative Scott grew more conservative likewise, till he came to think this particular king almost a pillar of the Constitution. I suppose we ought to explain this little bit of fetish-worship in Scott much as we should the quaint practical adhesion to duelling which he gave as an old man, who had had all his life much more to do with the pen than the sword—that is, as an evidence of the tendency of an improved type to recur to that of the old wild

stock on which it had been grafted. But certainly no feudal devotion of his ancestors to their chief was ever less justified by moral qualities than Scott's loyal devotion to the fountain of honour as embodied in "our fat friend." The whole relation to George was a grotesque thread in Scott's life ; and I cannot quite forgive him for the utterly conventional severity with which he threw over his first patron, the Queen, for sins which were certainly not grosser, if they were not much less gross, than those of his second patron, the husband who had set her the example which she faithfully, though at a distance, followed.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### SCOTT AS A POLITICIAN.

SCOTT usually professed great ignorance of politics, and did what he could to hold aloof from a world in which his feelings were very easily heated, while his knowledge was apt to be very imperfect. But now and again, and notably towards the close of his life, he got himself mixed up in politics, and I need hardly say that it was always on the Tory, and generally on the red-hot Tory, side. His first hasty intervention in politics was the song I have just referred to on Lord Melville's acquittal, during the short Whig administration of 1806. In fact Scott's comparative abstinence from politics was due, I believe, chiefly to the fact that during almost the whole of his literary life, Tories and not Whigs were in power. No sooner was any reform proposed, any abuse threatened, than Scott's eager Conservative spirit flashed up. Proposals were made in 1806 for changes—and, as it was thought, reforms—in the Scotch Courts of Law, and Scott immediately saw something like national calamity in the prospect. The mild proposals in question were discussed at a meeting of the Faculty of Advocates, when Scott made a speech longer than he had ever before delivered, and animated by a "flow and energy of eloquence" for which those who were accustomed to hear his debating speeches were quite unprepared. He walked home between two of the reformers, Mr. Jeffrey and another, when his companions began to compliment him on his eloquence, and to speak playfully of its subject. But Scott was in no mood for playfulness. "No, no," he exclaimed, "'tis no laughing matter ; little by little, whatever your wishes may be, you will destroy and undermine, until nothing of what makes Scotland Scotland shall remain !" "And so saying," adds Mr. Lockhart, "he turned round to conceal his agitation, but not until Mr. Jeffrey saw tears gushing down his cheek,—resting his head, until he

recovered himself, on the wall of the Mound.”\* It was the same strong feeling for old Scotch institutions which broke out so quaintly in the midst of his own worst troubles in 1826, on behalf of the Scotch banking-system, when he so eloquently defended in the letters of *Malachi Malagrouther*, what would now be called Home-Rule for Scotland, and indeed really defeated the attempt of his friends the Tories, who were the innovators this time, to encroach on those sacred institutions—the Scotch one-pound note, and the private-note circulation of the Scotch banks. But when I speak of Scott as a Home-Ruler, I should add that had not Scotland been for generations governed to a great extent, and, as he thought successfully, by Home-Rule, he was far too good a Conservative to have apologized for it at all. The basis of his Conservatism was always the danger of undermining a system which had answered so well. In the concluding passages of the letters to which I have just referred, he contrasts “Theory, a scroll in her hand, full of deep and mysterious combinations of figures, the least failure in any one of which may alter the result entirely,” with “a practical system successful for upwards of a century.” His vehement and unquailing opposition to Reform in almost the very last year of his life, when he had already suffered more than one stroke of paralysis, was grounded on precisely the same argument. At Jedburgh, on the 21st March, 1831, he appeared in the midst of an angry population (who hooted and jeered at him till he turned round fiercely upon them with the defiance, “I regard your gabble no more than the geese on the green,”) to urge the very same protest. “We in this district,” he said, “are proud, and with reason, that the first chain-bridge was the work of a Scotchman. It still hangs where he erected it a pretty long time ago. The French heard of our invention, and determined to introduce it, but with great improvements and embellishments. A friend of my own saw the thing tried. It was on the Seine at Marly. The French chain-bridge looked lighter and airier than the prototype. Every Englishman present was disposed to confess that we had been beaten at our own trade. But by-and-by the gates were opened, and the multitude were to pass over. It began to swing rather formidably beneath the pressure of the good company; and by the time the architect, who led the procession in great pomp and glory, reached the middle, the whole gave way, and he—worthy, patriotic artist—was the first that got a ducking. They had forgot the middle bolt,—or rather this ingenious person had conceived that to be a clumsy-looking feature, which might safely be dispensed with, while he put some invisible gimcrack of his own to supply its place.”† It is strange that Sir Walter did not see that this kind of criticism, so far as it applied at all to such

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 328.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 47.



an experiment as the Reform Bill, was even more in point as a rebuke to the rashness of the Scotch reformer who hung the first successful chain-bridge, than to the rashness of the French reformer of reform who devised an unsuccessful variation on it. The audacity of the first experiment was much the greater, though the competence of the person who made it was the greater also. And as a matter of fact, the political structure against the supposed insecurity of which Sir Walter was protesting, with all the courage of that dauntless though dying nature, was made by one who understood his work at least as well as the Scotch architect. The tramp of the many multitudes who have passed over it has never yet made it to "swing dangerously," and Lord Russell in the fulness of his age was but yesterday rejoicing in what he had achieved, and even in what those have achieved who have altered his work in the same spirit in which he designed it.

But though Sir Walter persuaded himself that his Conservatism was all founded in legitimate distrust of reckless change, there is evidence, I think, that at times at least it was due to elements less noble. The least creditable incident in the story of his political life—which Mr. Lockhart, with his usual candour, did not conceal—was the bitterness with which he resented a most natural and reasonable Parliamentary opposition to an appointment which he had secured for his favourite brother, Tom. In 1810 Scott appointed his brother Tom, who had failed as a Writer to the Signet, to a place vacant under himself as Clerk of Session. He had not given him the best place vacant, because he thought it his duty to appoint an official who had grown grey in the service, but he gave Tom Scott this man's place, which was worth about 250*l.* a year. In the meantime Tom Scott's affairs did not render it convenient for him to be come-at-able, and he absented himself, while they were being settled, in the Isle of Man. Further, the Commission on the Scotch system of judicature almost immediately reported that his office was one of supererogation, and ought to be abolished; but, to soften the blow, they proposed to allow him a pension of 130*l.* per annum. This proposal was discussed with some natural jealousy in the House of Lords. Lord Lauderdale thought that when Tom Scott was appointed, it must have been pretty evident that the Commission would propose to abolish his office, and that the appointment therefore should not have been made. "Mr. Thomas Scott," he said, "would have 130*l.* for life as an indemnity for an office the duties of which he never had performed, while those clerks who had laboured for twenty years had no adequate remuneration." Lord Holland supported this very reasonable and moderate view of the case; but of course the Ministry carried their way, and Tom Scott got his unearned pension. Nevertheless, Scott was furious with Lord Holland. Writing soon after to the happy recipient of this little pension, he says, "Lord Holland has been in Edinburgh, and we met accidentally at a public party. He

made up to me, but I remembered his part in your affair, and *cut* him with as little remorse as an old pen." Mr. Lockhart says, on Lord Jeffrey's authority, that the scene was a very painful one. Lord Jeffrey himself declared that it was the only rudeness of which he ever saw Scott guilty in the course of a life-long familiarity. And it is pleasant to know that he renewed his cordiality with Lord Holland in later years, though there is no evidence that he ever admitted that he had been in the wrong. But the incident shows how very doubtful Sir Walter ought to have felt as to the purity of his Conservatism. It is quite certain that the proposal to abolish Tom Scott's office without compensation was not a reckless experiment of a fundamental kind. It was a mere attempt at diminishing the heavy burdens laid on the people for the advantage of a small portion of the middle class, and yet Scott resented it with as much display of selfish passion—considering his genuine nobility of breeding—as that with which the rude working men of Jedburgh afterwards resented his gallant protest against the Reform Bill, and, later again, saluted the dauntless old man with the dastardly cry of "Burk Sir Walter!" Judged truly, I think Sir Walter's conduct in cutting Lord Holland "with as little remorse as an old pen," for simply doing his duty in the House of Lords, was quite as ignoble in him as the bullying and insolence of the democratic party in 1831, when the dying lion made his last dash at what he regarded as the foes of the Constitution. Doubtless he held that the mob, or, as we more decorously say, the residuum, were in some sense the enemies of true freedom. "I cannot read in history," he writes once to Mr. Laidlaw, "of any free State which has been brought to slavery till the rascal and uninstructed populace had had their short hour of anarchical government, which naturally leads to the stern repose of military despotism." But he does not seem ever to have perceived that educated men identify themselves with "the rascal and uninstructed populace," whenever they indulge on behalf of the selfish interests of their own class, passions such as he had indulged in fighting for his brother's pension. It is not the want of instruction, it is the rascaldom, i. e., the violent *esprit de corps* of a selfish class, which "naturally leads" to violent remedies. Such rascaldom exists in all classes, and not least in the class of the cultivated and refined. Generous and magnanimous as Scott was, he was evidently by no means free from the germs of it.

One more illustration of Scott's political Conservatism, and I may leave his political life, which was not indeed his strong side, though, as with all sides of Scott's nature, it had an energy and spirit all his own. On the subject of Catholic Emancipation he took a peculiar view. As he justly said, he hated bigotry, and would have left the Catholics quite alone, but for the great claims of their creed to interfere with political life. And even so, when the penal laws were once

abolished, he would have abolished also the representative disabilities, as quite useless, as well as very irritating when the iron system of effective repression had ceased. But he disapproved of the abolition of the political parts of the penal laws. He thought they would have stamped out Roman Catholicism ; and whether that were just or unjust, he thought it would be a great national service. "As for Catholic Emancipation," he wrote to Southey in 1807, "I am not, as God knows, a bigot in religious matters, nor a friend to persecution ; but if a particular set of religionists are *ipso facto* connected with foreign politics, and placed under the spiritual direction of a class of priests, whose unrivalled dexterity and activity are increased by the rules which detach them from the rest of the world—I humbly think that we may be excused from entrusting to them those places in the State where the influence of such a clergy, who act under the direction of a passive tool of our worst foe, is likely to be attended with the most fatal consequences. If a gentleman chooses to walk about with a couple of pounds of gunpowder in his pocket, if I give him the shelter of my roof, I may at least be permitted to exclude him from the seat next to the fire." \* And in relation to the year 1825, when Scott visited Ireland, Mr. Lockhart writes, "He on all occasions expressed manfully his belief that the best thing for Ireland would have been never to relax the strictly *political* enactments of the penal laws, however harsh these might appear. Had they been kept in vigour for another half century, it was his conviction that Popery would have been all but extinguished in Ireland. But he thought that after admitting Romanists to the elective franchise, it was a vain notion that they could be permanently or advantageously deterred from using that franchise in favour of those of their own persuasion."

In his diary in 1829 he puts the same view still more strongly :—"I cannot get myself to feel at all anxious about the Catholic question. I cannot see the use of fighting about the platter, when you have let them snatch the meat off it. I hold Popery to be such a mean and degrading superstition, that I am not sure I could have found myself liberal enough for voting the repeal of the penal laws as they existed before 1780. They must and would, in course of time, have smothered Popery ; and I confess that I should have seen the old lady of Babylon's mouth stopped with pleasure. But now that you have taken the plaster off her mouth, and given her free respiration, I cannot see the sense of keeping up the irritation about the claim to sit in Parliament. Unopposed, the Catholic superstition may sink into dust, with all its absurd ritual and solemnities. Still it is an awful risk. The world is in fact as silly as ever, and a good competence of nonsense will always find believers." † That is the view of a strong

\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 34.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 305.



and rather unscrupulous politician—a moss-trooper in politics—which Scott certainly was. He was thinking evidently very little of justice, almost entirely of the most effective means of keeping the Kingdom, the Kingdom which he loved. Had he understood—what none of the politicians of that day understood—the strength of the Church of Rome as the only consistent exponent of the principle of Authority in religion, I believe his opposition to Catholic emancipation would have been as bitter as his opposition to Parliamentary reform. But he took for granted that while only “silly” persons believed in Rome, and only “infidels” rejected an authoritative creed altogether, it was quite easy by the exercise of common sense to find the true compromise between reason and religious humility. Had Scott lived through the religious controversies of our own days, it seems not unlikely that with his vivid imagination, his warm Conservatism, and his rather inadequate critical powers, he might himself have become a Roman Catholic.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### SCOTT IN ADVERSITY.

WITH the year 1825 came a financial crisis, and Constable began to tremble for his solvency. From the date of his baronetcy Sir Walter had launched out into a considerable increase of expenditure. He got plans on a rather large scale in 1821 for the increase of Abbotsford, which were all carried out. To meet his expenses in this and other ways he received Constable's bills for “four unnamed works of fiction,” of which he had not written a line, but which came to exist in time, and were called *Peveril of the Peak*, *Quentine Durward*, *St. Ronan's Well*, and *Redgauntlet*. Again, in the very year before the crash, 1825, he married his eldest son, the heir to the title, to a young lady who was herself an heiress, Miss Jobson of Lochore, when Abbotsford and its estates were settled, with the reserve of 10,000*l.*, which Sir Walter took power to charge on the property for purposes of business. Immediately afterwards he purchased a captaincy in the King's Hussars for his son, which cost him 3500*l.* Nor were the obligations he incurred on his own account, or that of his family, the only ones by which he was burdened. He was always incurring expenses, often heavy expenses, for other people. Thus, when Mr. Terry, the actor, became joint lessee and manager of the Adelphi Theatre, London, Scott became his surety for 1250*l.*, while James Bal-lantyne became his surety for 500*l.* more, and both these sums had to be paid by Sir Walter after Terry's failure in 1828. Such obligations as these, however, would have been nothing when compared with Sir

Walter's means, had all his bills on Constable been duly honoured, and had not the printing firm of Ballantyne and Co. been so deeply involved with Constable's house that it necessarily became insolvent when he stopped. Taken altogether, I believe that Sir Walter earned during his own lifetime at least 140,000*l.* by his literary work alone, probably more; while even on his land and building combined he did not apparently spend more than half that sum. Then he had a certain income, about 1000*l.* a year, from his own and Lady Scott's private property, as well as 1300*l.* a year as Clerk of Session, and 300*l.* more as Sheriff of Selkirk. Thus even his loss of the price of several novels by Constable's failure would not seriously have compromised Scott's position, but for his share in the printing-house which fell with Constable, and the obligations of which amounted to 117,000*l.*

As Scott had always forestalled his income,—spending the purchase-money of his poems and novels before they were written,—such a failure as this, at the age of fifty-five, when all the freshness of his youth was gone out of him, when he saw his son's prospects blighted as well as his own, and knew perfectly that James Ballantyne, unassisted by him, could never hope to pay any fraction of the debt worth mentioning, would have been paralysing, had he not been a man of iron nerve, and of a pride and courage hardly ever equalled. Domestic calamity, too, was not far off. For two years he had been watching the failure of his wife's health with increasing anxiety, and as calamities seldom come singly, her illness took a most serious form at the very time when the blow fell, and she died within four months of the failure. Nay, Scott was himself unwell at the critical moment, and was taking sedatives which discomposed his brain. Twelve days before the final failure,—which was announced to him on the 17th January, 1826,—he enters in his diary, “Much alarmed. I had walked till twelve with Skene and Russell, and then sat down to my work. To my horror and surprise I could neither write nor spell, but put down one word for another, and wrote nonsense. I was much overpowered at the same time and could not conceive the reason. I fell asleep, however, in my chair, and slept for two hours. On my waking my head was clearer, and I began to recollect that last night I had taken the anodyne left for the purpose by Clarkson, and being disturbed in the course of the night, I had not slept it off.” In fact the hyoscyamus had, combined with his anxieties, given him a slight attack of what is now called *aphasia*, that brain disease the most striking symptom of which is that one word is mistaken for another. And this was Scott's preparation for his failure, and the bold resolve which followed it, to work for his creditors as he had worked for himself, and to pay off, if possible, the whole 117,000*l.* by his own literary exertions.

There is nothing in its way in the whole of English biography more impressive than the stoical extracts from Scott's diary which note the descent of this blow. Here is the anticipation of the previous day :

"Edinburgh, January 16th.—Came through cold roads to as cold news. Hurst and Robinson have suffered a bill to come back upon Constable, which, I suppose, infers the ruin of both houses. We shall soon see. Dined with the Skenes." And here is the record itself: "January 17th.—James Ballantyne this morning, good honest fellow, with a visage as black as the crook. He hopes no salvation; has, indeed, taken measures to stop. It is hard, after having fought such a battle. I have apologized for not attending the Royal Society Club, who have a *gaudeamus* on this day, and seemed to count much on my being the præses. My old acquaintance Miss Elizabeth Clerk, sister of Willie, died suddenly. I cannot choose but wish it had been Sir W. S., and yet the feeling is unmanly. I have Anne, my wife, and Charles to look after. I felt rather sneaking as I came home from the Parliament-house—felt as if I were liable *monstrari digito* in no very pleasant way. But this must be borne *cum cæteris*; and, thank God, however uncomfortable, I do not feel despondent."\* On the following day, the 18th January, the day after the blow, he records a bad night, a wish that the next two days were over, but that "the worst *is* over," and on the same day he sat about making notes for the *magnum opus*, as he called it—the complete edition of all the novels, with a new introduction and notes. On the 19th January, two days after the failure, he calmly resumed the composition of *Woodstock*—the novel on which he was then engaged—and completed, he says, "about twenty printed pages of it;" to which he adds that he had "a painful scene after dinner and another after supper, endeavouring to convince these poor creatures" [his wife and daughter] "that they must not look for miracles, but consider the misfortune as certain, and only to be lessened by patience and labour." On the 21st January, after a number of business details, he quotes from Job, "Naked we entered the world and naked we leave it; blessed be the name of the Lord." On the 22nd he says, "I feel neither dishonoured nor broken down by the bad, now truly bad, news I have received. I have walked my last in the domains I have planted—sat the last time in the halls I have built. But death would have taken them from me, if misfortune had spared them. My poor people whom I loved so well! There is just another die to turn up against me in this run of ill-luck, i. e. if I should break my magic wand in the fall from this elephant, and lose my popularity with my fortune. Then *Woodstock* and *Boney*" [his life of Napoleon] "may both go to the paper-maker, and I may take to smoking cigars and drinking grog, or turn devotee and intoxicate the brain another way."† He adds that when he sets to work doggedly, he is exactly the same man he ever was, "neither low-spirited nor *distract*," nay, that adversity is to him "a tonic and bracer."

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 197.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 203-4.



The heaviest blow was, I think, the blow to his pride. Very early he begins to note painfully the different way in which different friends greet him, to remark that some smile as if to say, "think nothing about it, my lad, it is quite out of our thoughts;" that others adopt an affected gravity, "such as one sees and despises at a funeral," and the best-bred "just shook hands and went on." He writes to Mr. Morritt with a proud indifference, clearly to some extent simulated:—"My womenkind will be the greater sufferers, yet even they look cheerily forward; and, for myself, the blowing off of my hat on a stormy day has given me more uneasiness."\* To Lady Davy he writes truly enough—"I beg my humblest compliments to Sir Humphrey, and tell him, Ill Luck, that direful chemist, never put into his crucible a more indissoluble piece of stuff than your affectionate cousin and sincere well-wisher, Walter Scott."† When his *Letters of Malachi Malagrouther* came out he writes:—"I am glad of this bruilzie, as far as I am concerned; people will not dare talk of me as an object of pity—no more 'poor-manning.' Who asks how many pounds Scott the old champion had in his pocket when

'He set a bugle to his mouth,  
And blew so loud and shrill,  
The trees in greenwood shook theateat,  
Sae loud rang every hill.'

This sounds conceited enough, yet it is not far from truth,"‡ His dread of pity is just the same when his wife dies:—"Will it be better," he writes, "when left to my own feelings, I see the whole world pipe and dance around me? I think it will. Their sympathy intrudes on my present affliction." Again, on returning for the first time from Edinburgh to Abbotsford after Lady Scott's funeral:—"I again took possession of the family bedroom and my widowed couch. This was a sore trial, but it was necessary not to blink such a resolution. Indeed, I do not like to have it thought that there is any way in which I can be beaten." And again:—"I have a secret pride—I fancy it will be so most truly termed—which impels me to mix with my distresses strange snatches of mirth. 'which have no mirth in them.'"§

But though pride was part of Scott's strength, pride alone never enabled any man to struggle so vigorously and so unremittingly as he did to meet the obligations he had incurred. When he was in Ireland in the previous year, a poor woman who had offered to sell him gooseberries, but whose offer had not been accepted, remarked, on seeing his daughter give some pence to a beggar, that they might

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 235.

† Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 238.

‡ viii. 277.

§ viii., 347, 371, 281.

as well give her an alms too, as she was "an old struggler." Sir Walter was struck with the expression, and said that it deserved to become classical, as a name for those who take arms against a sea of troubles, instead of yielding to the waves. It was certainly a name the full meaning of which he himself deserved. His house in Edinburgh was sold, and he had to go into a certain Mrs. Brown's lodgings, when he was discharging his duties as clerk of session. His wife was dead. His estate was conveyed to trustees for the benefit of his creditors till such time as he should pay off Ballantyne and Co's debt, which of course in his lifetime he never did. Yet between January, 1826, and January, 1828, he earned for his creditors very nearly 40,000*l*. *Woodstock* sold for 8228*l*., "a matchless sale," as Sir Walter remarked, "for less than three months' work." The first two editions of *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, on which Mr. Lockhart says that Scott had spent the unremitting labour of about two years—labour involving a far greater strain on eyes and brain than his imaginative work ever caused him—sold for 18,000*l*. Had Sir Walter's health lasted, he would have redeemed his obligations on behalf of Ballantyne and Co. within eight or nine years at most from the time of his failure. But what is more remarkable still, is that after his health failed he struggled on with little more than half a brain, but a whole will, to work while it was yet day, though the evening was dropping fast. *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous* were really the compositions of a paralytic patient.

It was in September, 1830, that the first of these tales was begun. As early as the 15th February of that year he had his first true paralytic seizure. He had been discharging his duties as clerk of session as usual, and received in the afternoon a visit from a lady friend of his, Miss Young, who was submitting to him some manuscript memoirs of her father, when the stroke came. It was but slight. He struggled against it with his usual iron power of will, and actually managed to stagger out of the room where the lady was sitting with him, into the drawing-room where his daughter was, but there he fell his full length on the floor. He was cupped, and fully recovered his speech during the course of the day, but Mr. Lockhart thinks that never, after this attack, did his style recover its full lucidity and terseness. A cloudiness in words and a cloudiness of arrangement began to be visible. In the course of the year he retired from his duties of clerk of session, and his publishers hoped that, by engaging him on the new and complete edition of his works, they might detach him from the attempt at imaginative creation for which he was now so much less fit. But Sir Walter's will survived his judgment. When, in the previous year, Ballantyne had been disabled from attending to business by his wife's illness (which ended in her death), Scott had written in his diary, "It is his (Ballantyne's) nature to indulge apprehensions of the worst which incapacitate him for labour. I cannot

help regarding this amiable weakness of the mind with something too nearly allied to contempt," and assuredly he was guilty of no such weakness himself. Not only did he row much harder against the stream of fortunes than he had ever rowed with it, but, what required still more resolution, he fought on against the growing conviction that his imagination would not kindle, as it used to do, to its old heat.

When he dictated to Laidlaw,—for at this time he could hardly write himself for rheumatism in the hand,—he would frequently pause and look round him, like a man "mocked with shadows." Then he bestirred himself with a great effort, rallied his force, and the style again flowed clear and bright, but not for long. The clouds would gather again, and the mental blank recur. This soon became visible to his publishers, who wrote discouragingly of the new novel—to Scott's own great distress and irritation. The oddest feature in the matter was that his letters to them were full of the old terseness and force and caustic turns. On business he was as clear and keen as in his best days. It was only at his highest task, the task of creative work, that his cunning began to fail him. Here, for instance, are a few sentences written to Cadell, his publisher, touching this very point—the discouragement which James Ballantyne had been pouring on the new novel. Ballantyne, he says, finds fault with the subject, when what he really should have found fault with was the failing power of the author:—"James is, with many other kindly critics, perhaps in the predicament of an honest drunkard, when crop-sick the next morning, who does not ascribe the malady to the wine he has drunk, but to having tasted some particular dish at dinner which disagreed with his stomach. . . . I have lost, it is plain, the power of interesting the country, and ought in justice to all parties, to retire while I have some credit. But this is an important step, and I will not be obstinate about it if it be necessary. . . . Frankly, I cannot think of flinging aside the half-finished volume as if it were a corked bottle of wine. . . . I may, perhaps, take a trip to the Continent for a year or two, if I find Othello's occupation gone, or rather Othello's reputation."\* And again, in a very able letter written on the 12th of December, 1830, to Cadell, he takes a view of the situation with as much calmness and imperturbability as if he were an outside spectator. "There were many circumstances in the matter which you and J. B. (James Ballantyne) could not be aware of, and which, if you were aware of, might have influenced your judgment, which had, and yet have a most powerful effect upon mine. The deaths of both my father and mother have been preceded by a paralytic shock. My father survived it for nearly two years—a melancholy respite, and not to be desired. I was alarmed with Miss Young's morning visit, when, as you know, I lost my speech. The medical people

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 11, 12.



said it was from the stomach, which might be, but while there is a doubt upon a point so alarming, you will not wonder that the subject, or, to use Hare's *lingo*, the *shot*, should be a little anxious." He relates how he had followed all the strict medical *régime* prescribed to him with scrupulous regularity, and then begun his work again with as much attention as he could. "And having taken pains with my story, I find it is not relished, nor indeed tolerated, by those who have no interest in condemning, but a strong interest in putting even a face" (? force) "upon their consciences. Was not this, in the circumstances, a damper to an invalid already afraid that the sharp edge might be taken off his intellect, though he was not himself sensible of that!" In fact, no more masterly discussion of the question whether his mind were failing or not, and what he ought to do in the interval of doubt, can be conceived, than these letters give us. At this time the debt of Ballantyne and Co. had been reduced by repeated dividends—all the fruits of Scott's literary work—more than one half. On the 17th of December, 1830, the liabilities stood at 54,000*l.*, having been reduced 63,000*l.* within five years. And Sir Walter, encouraged by this great result of his labour, resumed the suspended novel.

But with the beginning of 1831 came new alarms. On January 5th Sir Walter enters in his diary,—“Very indifferent, with more awkward feelings than I can well bear up against. My voice sunk and my head strangely confused.” Still he struggled on. On the 31st January he went alone to Edinburgh to sign his will, and stayed at his bookseller's (Cadell's) house in Athol Crescent. A great snow-storm set in which kept him in Edinburgh and in Mr. Cadell's house till the 9th February. One day while the snow was still falling heavily, Ballantyne reminded him that a motto was wanting for one of the chapters of *Count Robert of Paris*. He went to the window, looked out for a moment, and then wrote,—

“The storm increases; 'tis no sunny shower,  
Foster'd in the moist breast of March or April,  
Or such as parched summer cools his lips with  
Heaven's windows are flung wide; the inmost deeps  
Call, in hoarse greeting, one upon another;  
On comes the flood, in all its foaming horrors,  
And where's the dike shall stop it?”

*The Deluge: a Poem.*”

Clearly this failing imagination of Sir Walter's was still a great deal more vivid than that of most men, with brains as sound as it ever pleased Providence to make them. But his troubles were not yet even numbered. The “storm increased,” and it was, as he said, “no sunny shower.” His lame leg became so painful that he had to get a mechanical apparatus to relieve him of some of the burden of supporting it. Then, on the 21st March, he was hissed at Jedburgh, as I have before said, for his vehement opposition to Reform. In

April he had another stroke of paralysis which he now himself recognized as one. Still he struggled on at his novel. Under the date of May 6, 7, 8, he makes this entry in his diary :—"Here is a precious job. I have a formal remonstrance from those critical people, Ballantyne and Cadell, against the last volume of *Count Robert*, which is within a sheet of being finished. I suspect their opinion will be found to coincide with that of the public ; at least it is not very different from my own. The blow is a stunning one, I suppose, for I scarcely feel it. It is singular, but it comes with as little surprise as if I had a remedy ready ; yet God knows I am at sea in the dark, and the vessel leaky, I think, into the bargain. I cannot conceive that I have tied a knot with my tongue which my teeth cannot untie. We shall see. I have suffered terribly, that is the truth, rather in body than mind, and I often wish I could lie down and sleep without waking. But I will fight it out if I can."\* The medical men with one accord tried to make him give up his novel-writing. But he smiled and put them by. He took up *Count Robert of Paris* again, and tried to recast it. On the 18th May he insisted on attending the election for Roxburghshire, to be held at Jedburgh, and in spite of the unmannerly reception he had met with in March, no dissuasion would keep him at home. He was saluted in the town with groans and blasphemies, and Sir Walter had to escape from Jedburgh by a back way to avoid personal violence. The cries of "Burk Sir Walter," with which he was saluted on this occasion, haunted him throughout his illness and on his dying bed. At the Selkirk election it was Sir Walter's duty as Sheriff to preside, and his family therefore made no attempt to dissuade him from his attendance. There he was so well known and loved, that in spite of his Tory views, he was not insulted, and the only man who made any attempt to hustle the Tory electors, was seized by Sir Walter with his own hand, as he got out of his carriage, and committed to prison without resistance till the election day was over.

A seton which had been ordered for his head, gave him some relief, and of course the first result was that he turned immediately to his novel-writing again, and began *Castle Dangerous* in July, 1831,—the last July but one which he was to see at all. He even made a little journey in company with Mr. Lockhart, in order to see the scene of the story he wished to tell, and on his return set to work with all his old vigour to finish his tale, and put the concluding touches to *Count Robert of Paris*. But his temper was no longer what it had been. He quarrelled with Ballantyne, partly for his depreciatory criticism of *Count Robert of Paris*, partly for his growing tendency to a mystic and strait-laced sort of dissent and his increasing Liberalism. Even Mr. Laidlaw and Scott's children had

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\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 65-6.

much to bear. But he struggled on even to the end, and did not consent to try the experiment of a voyage and visit to Italy till his immediate work was done. Well might Lord Chief Baron Shepherd apply to Scott Cicero's description of some contemporary of his own, who "had borne adversity wisely, who had not been broken by fortune, and who, amidst the buffets of fate, had maintained his dignity." There was in Sir Walter, I think, at least as much of the Stoic as the Christian. But Stoic or Christian, he was a hero of the old, indomitable type. Even the last fragments of his imaginative power were all turned to account by that unconquerable will, amidst the discouragement of friends, and the still more disheartening doubts of his own mind. Like the headland stemming a rough sea, he was gradually worn away, but never crushed.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE LAST YEAR.

IN the month of September, 1831, the disease of the brain which had long been in existence must have made a considerable step in advance. For the first time the illusion seemed to possess Sir Walter that he had paid off all the debt for which he was liable, and that he was once more free to give as his generosity prompted. Scott sent Mr. Lockhart 50*l.* to save his grandchildren some slight inconvenience, and told another of his correspondents that he had "put his decayed fortune into as good a condition as he could desire." It was well, therefore, that he had at last consented to try the effect of travel on his health,—not that he could hope to arrest by it such a disease as his, but that it diverted him from the most painful of all efforts, that of trying anew the spell which had at last failed him, and perceiving in the disappointed eyes of his old admirers that the magic of his imagination was a thing of the past. The last day of real enjoyment was at Abbotsford—for when Sir Walter returned to it to die, it was but to catch once more the outlines of its walls, the rustle of its woods, and the gleam of its waters, through senses already darkened to all less familiar and less fascinating visions—was the 22nd September, 1831. On the 21st, Wordsworth had come to bid his old friend adieu, and on the 22nd—the last day at home—they spent the morning together in a visit to Newark. It was a day to deepen alike in Scott and in Wordsworth whatever of sympathy either of them had with the very different genius of the other, and that it had this result with Wordsworth's case, we know from the very beautiful poem,—"*Yarrow Revisited*,"—and the sennet which the occa-



sion also produced. And even Scott, who was so little of a Wordsworthian, who enjoyed Johnson's stately but formal verse, and Crabbe's vivid Dutch painting, more than he enjoyed the poetry of the transcendental school, must have recurred that day with more than usual emotion to his favourite Wordsworthian poem. Soon after his wife's death, he had remarked in his diary how finely "the effect of grief upon persons who like myself are highly susceptible of humour" had been "touched by Wordsworth in the character of the merry village teacher, Matthew, whom Jeffrey profanely calls a half-crazy, sentimental person."\* And long before this time, during the brightest period of his life, Scott had made the old Antiquary of his novel quote the same poem of Wordsworth's, in a passage where the period of life at which he had now arrived is anticipated with singular pathos and force. "It is at such moments as these," says Mr. Oldbuck, "that we feel the change of time. The same objects are before us—those inanimate things which we have gazed on in wayward infancy and impetuous youth, in anxious and scheming manhood—they are permanent and the same; but when we look upon them in cold and unfeeling old age, can we, changed in our temper, our pursuits, our feelings,—changed in our form, our limbs. and our strength,—can we be ourselves called the same? or do we not rather look back with a sort of wonder upon our former selves as beings separate and distinct from what we now are? The philosopher who appealed from Philip inflamed with wine to Philip in his hours of sobriety, did not claim a judge so different as if he had appealed from Philip in his youth to Philip in his old age. I cannot but be touched with the feeling so beautifully expressed in a poem which I have heard repeated :—

My eyes are dim with childish tears,  
 My heart is idly stirr'd,  
 For the same sound is in my ears  
 Which in those days I heard.  
 Thus fares it still in our decay,  
 And yet the wiser mind  
 Mourns less for what age takes away  
 Than what it leaves behind.' †

Sir Walter's memory, which, in spite of the slight failure of brain and the mild illusions to which, on the subject of his own prospects, he was now liable, had as yet been little impaired—indeed, he could still quote whole pages from all his favourite authors—must have recurred to those favourite Wordsworthian lines of his with singular force, as, with Wordsworth for his companion, he gazed on the refuge of the last Minstrel of his imagination for the last time, and felt in himself how much of joy in the sight, age had taken away, and how

\* Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 63

† *The Antiquary*, chap. x.

much, too, of the habit of expecting it, it had unfortunately left behind. Whether Sir Walter recalled this poem of Wordsworth's on this occasion or not—and if he recalled it, his delight in giving pleasure would assuredly have led him to let Wordsworth know that he recalled it—the mood it paints was unquestionably that in which his last day at Abbotsford was passed. In the evening, referring to the journey which was to begin the next day, he remarked that Fielding and Smollet had been driven abroad by declining health, and that they had never returned; while Wordsworth—willing perhaps to bring out a brighter feature in the present picture—regretted that the last days of those two great novelists had not been surrounded by due marks of respect. With Sir Walter, as he well knew, it was different. The Liberal Government that he had so bitterly opposed were pressing on him signs of the honour in which he was held, and a ship of his Majesty's navy had been placed at his disposal to take him to the Mediterranean. And Wordsworth himself added his own more durable token of reverence. As long as English poetry lives, Englishmen will know something of that last day of the last Minstrel of Newark:—

“Grave thoughts ruled wide on that sweet day,

    Their dignity installing

In gentle bosoms, while sere leaves

    Were on the bough or falling;

But breezes play'd, and sunshine gleam'd

    The forest to embolden,

Redden'd the fiery hues, and shot

    Transparence through the golden.

“For busy thoughts the stream flow'd on

    In foamy agitation;

And slept in many a crystal pool

    For quiet contemplation:

No public and no private care

    The free born mind entralling,

We made a day of happy hours,

    Our happy days recalling.

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“And if, as Yarrow through the woods

    And down the meadow ranging,

Did meet us with unalter'd face,

    Though we were changed and changing;

If *then* some natural shadow spread

    Our inward prospect over,

The soul's deep valley was not slow

    Its brightness to recover.

“Eternal blessings on the Muse

    And her divine employment,

The blameless Muse who trains her sons

    For hope and calm enjoyment;

Albeit sickness lingering yet

    Has o'er their pillow brooded,

And care waylays their steps—a sprite

    Not easily eluded.

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“Nor deem that localized Romance  
 Plays false with our affections ;  
 Unsanctifies our tears—made sport  
 For fanciful dejections :  
 Ah, no ! the visions of the past  
 Sustain the heart in feeling  
 Life as she is—our changeful Life  
 With friends and kindred dealing.

“Bear witness ye, whose thoughts that day  
 In Yarrow’s groves were centred,  
 Who through the silent portal arch  
 Of mouldering Newark enter’d ;  
 And clomb the winding stair that once  
 Too timidly was mounted  
 By the last Minstrel—not the last !—  
 Ere he his tale recounted.”

Thus did the meditative poetry, the day of which was not yet, do honour to itself in doing homage to the Minstrel of romantic energy and martial enterprise, who, with the school of poetry he loved, was passing away.

On the 23rd September Scott left Abbotsford, spending five days on his journey to London ; nor would he allow any of the old objects of interest to be passed without getting out of the carriage to see them. He did not leave London for Portsmouth till the 23rd October, but spent the intervening time in London, where he took medical advice, and with his old shrewdness wheeled his chair into a dark corner during the physician’s absence from the room to consult, that he might read their faces clearly on their return without their being able to read his. They recognized traces of brain disease, but Sir Walter was relieved by their comparatively favourable opinion ; for he admitted that he had feared insanity, and therefore had “feared *them*.” On the 29th October he sailed for Malta, and on the 20th November Sir Walter insisted on being landed on a small volcanic island which had appeared four months previously, and which disappeared again in a few days, and on clambering about its crumbling lava, in spite of sinking at nearly every step almost up to his knees, in order that he might send a description of it to his old friend Mr. Skene. On the 22nd November he reached Malta, where he looked eagerly at the antiquities of the place, for he still hoped to write a novel—and, indeed, actually wrote one at Naples, which was never published, called *The Siege of Malta*—on the subject of the Knights of Malta, who had interested him so much in his youth. From Malta Scott went to Naples, which he reached on the 17th December, and where he found much pleasure in the society of Sir William Gell, an invalid like himself, but not one who, like himself, struggled against the admission of his infirmities, and refused to be carried when his own legs would not safely carry him. Sir William Gell’s dog delighted the old man ; he would pat it and call it “Poor boy !”



and confide to Sir William how he had at home "two very fine favourite dogs, so large that I am always afraid they look too large and too feudal for my diminished income." In all his letters home he gave some injunction to Mr. Laidlaw about the poor people and the dogs.

On the 22nd of March, 1832, Goethe died, an event which made a great impression on Scott, who had intended to visit Weimar on his way back, on purpose to see Goethe, and this much increased his eager desire to return home. Accordingly on the 16th of April, the last day on which he made any entry in his diary, he quitted Naples for Rome, where he stayed long enough only to let his daughter see something of the place, and hurried off homewards on the 21st of May. In Venice he was still strong enough to insist on scrambling down into the dungeons adjoining the Bridge of Sighs; and at Frankfort he entered a bookseller's shop, when the man brought out a lithograph of Abbotsford, and Scott, remarking, "I know that already, sir," left the shop unrecognized, more than ever craving for home. At Nimeguen, on the 9th of June, while in a steamboat on the Rhine, he had his most serious attack of apoplexy, but would not discontinue his journey, was lifted into an English steamboat at Rotterdam on the 11th of June, and arrived in London on the 13th. There he recognized his children, and appeared to expect immediate death, as he gave them repeatedly his solemn blessing, but for the most part he lay at the St. James's Hotel, in Jermyn Street, without any power to converse. There it was that Allan Cunningham, on walking home one night, found a group of working men at the corner of the street, who stopped him and asked, "as if there was but one death-bed in London, 'Do you know, sir, if this is the street where he is dying?'" According to the usual irony of destiny, it was while the working men were doing him this hearty and unconscious homage, that Sir Walter, whenever disturbed by the noises of the street, imagined himself at the polling-booth of Jedburgh, where the people had cried out, "Burk Sir Walter." And it was while lying here,—only now and then uttering a few words,—that Mr. Lockhart says of him, "He expressed his will as determinedly as ever, and expressed it with the same apt and good-natured irony that he was wont to use."

Sir Walter's great and urgent desire was to return to Abbotsford, and at last his physicians yielded. On the 7th July he was lifted into his carriage, followed by his trembling and weeping daughters, and so taken to a steamboat, where the captain gave up his private cabin—a cabin on deck—for his use. He remained unconscious of any change till after his arrival in Edinburgh, when, on the 11th July, he was placed again in his carriage, and remained in it quite unconscious during the first two stages of the journey to Tweedside. But as the carriage entered the valley of the Gala, he began to look

about him. Presently he murmured a name or two, "Gala water, surely,—Bückholm,—Torwoodlee." When the outline of the Eildon hills came in view, Scott's excitement was great, and when his eye caught the towers of Abbotsford, he sprang up with a cry of delight, and while the towers remained in sight it took his physician, his son-in-law, and his servant, to keep him in the carriage. Mr. Laidlaw was waiting for him, and he met him with a cry, "Ha! Willie Laidlaw! O, man, how often I have thought of you!" His dogs came round his chair and began to fawn on him and lick his hands, while Sir Walter smiled or sobbed over them. The next morning he was wheeled about his garden, and on the following morning was out in this way for a couple of hours; within a day or two he fancied that he could write again, but on taking the pen into his hand, his fingers could not clasp it, and he sank back with tears rolling down his cheek. Later, when Laidlaw said in his hearing that Sir Walter had had a little repose, he replied, "No, Willie; no repose for Sir Walter but in the grave." As the tears rushed from his eyes, his old pride revived. "Friends," he said, "don't let me expose myself—get me to bed,—that is the only place."

After this Sir Walter never left his room. Occasionally he dropped off into delirium, and the old painful memory,—that cry of "Burk Sir Walter,"—might be again heard on his lips. He lingered, however, till the 21st September,—more than two months from the day of his reaching home, and a year from the day of Wordsworth's arrival at Abbotsford before his departure for the Mediterranean, with only one clear interval of consciousness, on Monday, the 17th September. On that day Mr. Lockhart was called to Sir Walter's bedside with the news that he had awakened in a state of composure and consciousness, and wished to see him. "'Lockhart,' he said. 'I may have but a minute to speak to you. My dear, be a good man,—be virtuous,—be religious,—be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here.' He paused, and I said, 'Shall I send for Sophia and Anne?' 'No,' said he, 'don't disturb them. Poor souls! I know they were up all night. God bless you all!'" With this he sank into a very tranquil sleep, and, indeed, he scarcely afterwards gave any sign of consciousness except for an instant on the arrival of his sons. And so four days afterwards, on the day of the autumnal equinox in 1832, at half-past one in the afternoon, on a glorious autumn day, with every window wide open, and the ripple of the Tweed over its pebbles distinctly audible in his room, he passed away, and "his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes." He died a month after completing his sixty-first year. Nearly seven years earlier, on the 7th December, 1825, he had in his diary taken a survey of his own health in relation to the age reached by his father and other members of his family, and had stated as the result of his considerations, "Square the odds and good night, Sir

Walter, about sixty. I care not if I leave my name unstained and my family property settled. *Sat est vixisse.*" Thus he lived just a year—but a year of gradual death—beyond his own calculation.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE END OF THE STRUGGLE.

SIR WALTER certainly left his "name unstained," unless the serious mistakes natural to a sanguine temperament such as his, are to be counted as stains upon his name; and if they are, where among the sons of men would you find many unstained names as noble as his with such a stain upon it? He was not only sensitively honourable in motive, but, when he found what evil his sanguine temper had worked, he used his gigantic powers to repair it, as Samson used his great strength to repair the mischief he had inadvertently done to Israel. But with all his exertions he had not, when death came upon him, cleared off much more than half his obligations. There was still 54,000*l.* to pay. But of this, 22,000*l.* was secured in an insurance on his life, and there were besides a thousand pounds or two in the hands of the trustees, which had not been applied to the extinction of the debt. Mr. Cadell, his publisher, accordingly advanced the remaining 30,000*l.* on the security of Sir Walter's copyrights, and on the 21st February, 1833, the general creditors were paid in full, and Mr. Cadell remained the only creditor of the estate. In February, 1847, Sir Walter's son, the second baronet, died childless; and in May, 1847, Mr. Cadell gave a discharge in full of all claims, including the bond for 10,000*l.* executed by Sir Walter during the struggles of Constable and Co. to prevent a failure, on the transfer to him of all the copyrights of Sir Walter, including "the results of some literary exertions of the sole surviving executor," which I conjecture to mean the copyright of the admirable biography of Sir Walter Scott in ten volumes, to which I have made such a host of references—probably the most perfect specimen of a biography rich in great materials, which our language contains. And thus, nearly fifteen years after Sir Walter's death, the debt which, within six years, he had more than half discharged, was at last, through the value of the copyrights he had left behind him, finally extinguished, and the small estate of Abbotsford left cleared.

Sir Walter's effort to found a new house was even less successful than the effort to endow it. His eldest son died childless. In 1839 he went to Madras, as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 15th Hussars, and subsequently commanded that regiment. He was as much beloved



by the officers of his regiment as his father had been by his own friends, and was in every sense an accomplished soldier, and one whose greatest anxiety it was to promote the welfare of the privates as well as of the officers of his regiment. He took great pains in founding a library for the soldiers of his corps, and his only legacy out of his own family was one of 100*l.* to this library. The cause of his death was his having exposed himself rashly to the sun in a tiger-hunt, in August, 1846 ; he never recovered from the fever which was the immediate consequence. Ordered home for his health, he died near the Cape of Good Hope, on the 8th of February, 1847. His brother Charles died before him. He was rising rapidly in the diplomatic service, and was taken to Persia by Sir John MacNeill, on a diplomatic mission, as attaché and private secretary. But the climate struck him down, and he died at Teheran, almost immediately on his arrival, on the 28th October, 1841. Both the sisters had died previously. Anne Scott, the younger of the two, whose health had suffered greatly during the prolonged anxiety of her father's illness, died on the Midsummer-day of the year following her father's death ; and Sophia, Mrs. Lockhart, died on the 17th May, 1837. Sir Walter's eldest grandchild, John Hugh Lockhart, for whom the *Tales of a Grandfather* were written, died before his grandfather ; indeed Sir Walter heard of the child's death at Naples. The second son, Walter Scott Lockhart Scott, a lieutenant in the army, died at Versailles, on the 10th January, 1853. Charlotte Harriet Jane Lockhart, who was married in 1847 to James Robert Hope-Scott, and succeeded to the Abbotsford estate, died at Edinburgh, on the 26th October, 1858, leaving three children, of whom only one survives. Walter Michael and Margaret Anne Hope-Scott both died in infancy. The only direct descendant, therefore, of Sir Walter Scott, is now Mary Monica Hope-Scott, who was born on the 2nd October, 1852, the grandchild of Mrs. Lockhart, and the great-grandchild of the founder of Abbotsford.

There is something of irony in such a result of the Herculean labours of Scott to found and endow a new branch of the clan of Scott. When fifteen years after his death the estate was at length freed from debt, all his own children and the eldest of his grandchildren were dead ; and now forty-six years have elapsed, and there only remains one girl of his descendants to borrow his name and live in the halls of which he was so proud. And yet this, and this only, was wanting to give something of the grandeur of tragedy to the end of Scott's great enterprise. He valued his works little compared with the house and lands which they were to be the means of gaining for his descendants ; yet every end for which he struggled so gallantly is all but lost, while his works have gained more of added lustre from the losing battle which he fought so long, than they could ever have gained from his success.

What there was in him of true grandeur could never have been

seen, had the fifth act of his life been less tragic than it was. Generous, large-hearted, and magnanimous as Scott was, there was something in the days of his prosperity that fell short of what men need for their highest ideal of a strong man. Unbroken success, unrivalled popularity, imaginative effort flowing almost as steadily as the current of a stream,—these are characteristics, which, even when enhanced as they were in his case, by the power to defy physical pain, and to live in his imaginative world when his body was writhing in torture, fail to touch the heroic point. And there was nothing in Scott, while he remained prosperous, to relieve adequately the glare of triumphant prosperity. His religious and moral feeling, though strong and sound, was purely regulative, and not always even regulative, where his inward principle was not reflected in the opinions of the society in which he lived. The finer spiritual element in Scott was relatively deficient, and so the strength of the natural man was almost too equal, complete, and glaring. Something that should “tame the glaring white” of that broad sunshine, was needed; and in the years of reverse, when one gift after another was taken away, till at length what he called even his “magic wand” was broken, and the old man struggled on to the last, without bitterness, without defiance, without murmuring, but not without such sudden flashes of subduing sweetness as melted away the anger of the teacher of his childhood,—that something seemed to be supplied. Till calamity came, Scott appeared to be a nearly complete natural man, and no more. Then first was perceived in him something above nature, something which could endure though every end in life for which he had fought so boldly should be defeated,—something which could endure and more than endure, which could shoot a soft transparence of its own through his years of darkness and decay. That there was nothing very elevated in Scott’s personal or moral, or political or literary ends,—that he never for a moment thought of himself as one who was bound to leave the earth better than he found it,—that he never seems to have so much as contemplated a social or political reform for which he ought to contend,—that he lived to some extent like a child blowing soap-bubbles, the brightest and most gorgeous of which—the Abbotsford bubble—vanished before his eyes, is not a take-off from the charm of his career, but adds to it the very speciality of its fascination. For it was his entire unconsciousness of moral or spiritual efforts, the simple straightforward way in which he laboured for ends of the most ordinary kind, which made it clear how much greater the man was than his ends, how great was the mind and character which prosperity failed to display, but which became visible at once so soon as the storm came down and the night fell. Few men who battle avowedly for the right, battle for it with the calm fortitude, the cheerful equanimity, with which Scott battled to fulfil his engagements and to save his family from ruin. He stood high amongst those—

"Who ever w'th a frolic welcome took  
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
Free hearts, free foreheads,"

among those who have been able to display—

"One equal temper of heroic hearts  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

And it was because the man was so much greater than the ends for which he strove, that there is a sort of grandeur in the tragic fate which denied them to him, and yet exhibited to all the world the infinite superiority of the striver himself to the toy he was thus passionately craving.





# THACKERAY.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.





# THACKERAY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### BIOGRAPHICAL.

IN the foregoing volumes of this series of *English Men of Letters*, and in other works of a similar nature which have appeared lately as to the *Ancient Classics* and *Foreign Classics*, biography has naturally been, if not the leading, at any rate a considerable element. The desire is common to all readers to know not only what a great writer has written, but also of what nature has been the man who has produced such great work. As to all the authors taken in hand before there has been extant some written record of the man's life, Biographical details have been more or less known to the world, so that, whether of a Cicero, or of a Goethe, or of our own Johnson, there has been a story to tell. Of Thackeray no life has been written; and though they who knew him—and possibly many who did not—are conversant with anecdotes of the man, who was one so well known in society as to have created many anecdotes, yet there has been no memoir of his life sufficient to supply the wants of even so small a work as this purports to be. For this the reason may simply be told. Thackeray, not long before his death, had had his taste offended by some fulsome biography. Paragraphs, of which the eulogy seemed to have been the produce rather of personal love than of inquiry or judgment, disgusted him, and he begged of his girls that when he should have gone there should nothing of the sort be done with his name.

We can imagine how his mind had worked, how he had declared to himself that, as by those loving hands into which his letters, his notes, his little details—his literary remains, as such documents used to be called—might naturally fall, truth of his foibles and of his shortcomings could not be told, so should not his praises be written, or that flattering portrait be limned which biographers are wont to produce. Acting upon these instructions his daughters—while there were two living, and since that the one surviving—have carried out the order which has appeared to them to be sacred. Such being the

case, it certainly is not my purpose now to write what may be called a life of Thackeray. In this preliminary chapter I will give such incidents and anecdotes of his life as will tell the reader perhaps all about him that a reader is entitled to ask. I will tell how he became an author, and will say how first he worked and struggled, and then how he worked and prospered, and became a household word in English Literature; how, in this way, he passed through that course of mingled failure and success which, though the literary aspirant may suffer, is probably better both for the writer and for the writings than unclouded early glory. The suffering, no doubt, is acute, and a touch of melancholy, perhaps of indignation, may be given to words which have been written while the heart has been too full of its own wrongs; but this is better than the continued note of triumph, which is still heard in the final voices of the spoilt child of literature, even when they are losing their music. Then I will tell how Thackeray died, early indeed, but still having done a good life's work. Something of his manner, something of his appearance I can say, something perhaps of his condition of mind: because for some years he was known to me. But of the continual intercourse of himself with the world, and of himself with his own works, I can tell little, because no record of his life has been made public.

William Makepeace Thackeray was born at Calcutta, on July 18, 1811. His father was Richmond Thackeray, son of W. M. Thackeray of Hadley, near Barnet, in Middlesex. A relation of his, of the same name, a Rev. Mr. Thackeray, I knew well as rector of Hadley, many years afterwards. Him I believe to have been a second cousin of our Thackeray, but I think they had never met each other. Another cousin was Provost of Kings at Cambridge, fifty years ago, as Cambridge men will remember. Clergymen of the family have been numerous in England during the century; and there was one, a Rev. Elias Thackeray, whom I also knew in my youth, a dignitary, if I remember right, in the diocese of Meath. The Thackerays seem to have affected the Church; but such was not at any period of his life the bias of our novelist's mind.

His father and grandfather were Indian civil servants. His mother was Anne Becher, whose father was also in the Company's service. She married early in India, and was only nineteen when her son was born. She was left a widow in 1816, with only one child, and was married a few years afterwards to Major Henry Carmichael Smyth, with whom Thackeray lived on terms of affectionate intercourse till the major died. All who knew William Makepeace remember his mother well, a handsome, spare, gray-haired lady, whom Thackeray treated with a courtly deference as well as constant affection. There was, however, something of discrepancy between them as to matters of religion. Mrs. Carmichael Smyth was disposed to the somewhat austere observance of the evangelical section of the Church. Such,

certainly, never became the case with her son. There was disagreement on the subject, and probably unhappiness at intervals, but never, I think, quarreling. Thackeray's house was his mother's home whenever she pleased it and the home also of his step-father.

He was brought a child from India, and was sent early to the Charter House. Of his life and doings there his friend and school-fellow George Venables writes to me as follows :

"My recollection of him, though fresh enough, does not furnish much material for biography. He came to school young—a pretty, gentle, and rather timid boy. I think his experience there was not generally pleasant. Though he had afterwards a scholarlike knowledge of Latin, he did not attain distinction in the school ; and I should think that the character of the head-master, Dr. Russell, which was vigorous, unsympathetic, and stern, though not severe, was uncongenial to his own. With the boys who knew him, Thackeray was popular; but he had no skill in games, and, I think, no taste for them. . . . He was already known by his faculty of making verses, chiefly parodies. I only remember one line of one parody on a poem of L. E. L.'s, about 'Violets, dark blue violets ;' Thackeray's version was 'Cabbages, bright green cabbages,' and we thought it very witty. He took part in a scheme, which came to nothing, for a school magazine, and he wrote verses for it, of which I only remember that they were good of their kind. When I knew him better, in later years, I thought I could recognize the sensitive nature which he had as a boy. . . . His change of retrospective feeling about his school days was very characteristic. In his earlier books he always spoke of the Charter House as Slaughter House and Smithfield. As he became famous and prosperous his memory softened, and Slaughter House was changed into Grey Friars, where Colonel Newcome ended his life."

In February, 1829, when he was not as yet eighteen, Thackeray went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, and was, I think, removed in 1830. It may be presumed, therefore, that his studies there were not very serviceable to him. There are few, if any, records left of his doings at the university—unless it be the fact that he did there commence the literary work of his life. The line about the cabbages, and the scheme of the school magazine, can hardly be said to have amounted to even a commencement. In 1829 a little periodical was brought out at Cambridge, called *The Snob*, with an assurance on the title that it was *not* conducted by members of the university. It is presumed that Thackeray took a hand in editing this. He certainly wrote, and published in the little paper, some burlesque lines on the subject which was given for the Chancellor's prize poem of the year. This was *Timbuctoo*, and Tennyson was the victor on the occasion. There is some good fun in the four first and four last lines of Thackeray's production.

In Africa—a quarter of the world—  
Men's skins are black : their hair is crisped and curled ;  
And somewhere there, unknown to public view,  
A mighty city lies, called Timbuctoo.

\* \* \* \* \*  
I see her tribes the hill of glory mount,  
And sell their sugar on their own account ;



While around her throne the prostrate nations come,  
Sue for her rice, and barter for her rum.

I cannot find in *The Snob* internal evidence of much literary merit beyond this. But then how many great writers have there been from whose early lucubrations no future literary excellence could be prognosticated?

There is something at any rate in the name of the publication which tells of work that did come. Thackeray's mind was at all times peculiarly exercised with a sense of snobbishness. His appreciation of the vice grew abnormally, so that at last he had a morbid horror of a snob—a morbid fear lest this or the other man should turn snob on his hands. It is probable that the idea was taken from the early *Snob* at Cambridge, either from his own participation in the work or from his remembrance of it. *The Snob* lived, I think, but nine weeks, and was followed at an interval, in 1830, by *The Gownsmen*, which lived to the seventeenth number, and at the opening of which Thackeray no doubt had a hand. It professed to be a continuation of *The Snob*. It contains a dedication to all proctors, which I should not be sorry to attribute to him. "To all Proctors, past, present, and future—

Whose taste it is our privilege to follow,  
Whose virtue it is our duty to imitate,  
Whose presence it is our interest to avoid."

There is, however, nothing beyond fancy to induce me to believe that Thackeray was the author of the dedication, and I do not know that there is any evidence to show that he was connected with *The Snob* beyond the writing of *Timbuctoo*.

In 1830 he left Cambridge, and went to Weimar either in that year or in 1831. Between Weimar and Paris he spent some portion of his earlier years, while his family—his mother, that is, and his step-father—were living in Devonshire. It was then the purport of his life to become an artist, and he studied drawing at Paris, affecting especially Bonington, the young English artist who had himself painted at Paris, and who had died in 1828. He never learned to draw—perhaps never could have learned. That he was idle, and did not do his best, we may take for granted. He was always idle, and only on some occasions, when the spirit moved him thoroughly, did he do his best even in after-life. But with drawing—or rather without it—he did wonderfully well even when he did his worst. He did illustrate his own books, and everyone knows how incorrect were his delineations. But as illustrations they were excellent. How often have I wished that characters of my own creating might be sketched as faultily, if with the same appreciation of the intended purpose. Let anyone look at the "plates," as they are called, in *Vanity Fair*, and compare each with the scenes and the characters in ended to be dis-

played, and there see whether the artist—if we may call him so—has not managed to convey in the picture the exact feeling which he has described in the text. I have a little sketch of his in which a cannon-ball is supposed to have just carried off the head of an aide-de-camp—messenger I had perhaps better say, lest I might affront military feelings—who is kneeling on the field of battle and delivering a despatch to Marlborough on horseback. The graceful ease with which the duke receives the message though the messenger's head be gone, and the soldier-like precision with which the headless hero finishes his last effort of military obedience, may not have been portrayed with well-drawn figures, but no finished illustration ever told its story better. Dickens has informed us that he first met Thackeray in 1835, on which occasion the young artist aspirant, looking no doubt after profitable employment, “proposed to become the illustrator of my earliest book.” It is singular that such should have been the first interview between the two great novelists. We may presume that the offer was rejected.

In 1832, Thackeray came of age, and inherited his fortune—as to which various stories have been told. It seems to have amounted to about five hundred a year, and to have passed through his hands in a year or two, interest and principal. It has been told of him that it was all taken away from him at cards, but such was not the truth. Some went in an Indian bank, in which he invested it. A portion was lost at cards. But with some of it—the larger part, as I think—he endeavoured, in concert with his stepfather, to float a newspaper, which failed. There seem to have been two newspapers in which he was so concerned, *The National Standard* and *The Constitutional*. On the latter he was engaged with his stepfather, and in carrying that on he lost the last of his money. *The National Standard* had been running for some weeks when Thackeray joined it, and lost his money in it. It ran only for little more than twelve months, and then, the money having gone, the periodical came to an end. I know no road to fortune more tempting to a young man, or one that with more certainty leads to ruin. Thackeray, who in a way more or less correct often refers in his writings, if not to the incidents, at any rate to the remembrances of his own life, tells us much of the story of this newspaper in *Lovel the Widower*. “They are welcome,” says the bachelor, “to make merry at my charges in respect of a certain bargain which I made on coming to London, and in which, had I been Moses Primrose purchasing green spectacles, I could scarcely been more taken in. My Jenkinson was an old college acquaintance, whom I was idiot enough to imagine a respectable man. The fellow had a very smooth tongue and sleek sanctified exterior. He was rather a popular preacher, and used to cry a good deal in the pulpit. He and a queer wine-merchant and bill discounter, Sherrick by name, had somehow got possession of that neat little literary paper, *The Museum*, which per-

haps you remember, and this eligible literary property my friend Honeyman, with his wheedling tongue, induced me to purchase." Here is the history of Thackeray's money, told by himself plainly enough, but with no intention on his part of narrating an incident in his own life to the public. But the drollery of the circumstances, his own mingled folly and young ambition, struck him as being worth narration, and the more forcibly as he remembered all the ins and outs of his own reflections at the time—how he had meant to enchant the world, and make his fortune. There was literary capital in it of which he could make use after so many years. Then he tells us of this ambition, and of the folly of it; and at the same time puts forward the excuses to be made for it. "I daresay I gave myself airs as editor of that confounded *Museum*, and proposed to educate the public taste, to diffuse morality and sound literature throughout the nation, and to pocket a liberal salary in return for my services. I daresay I printed my own sonnets, my own tragedy, my own verses. . . . I daresay I wrote satirical articles. . . . I daresay I made a gaby of myself to the world. Pray, my good friend, hast thou never done likewise? If thou hast never been a fool, be sure thou wilt never be a wise man." Thackeray was quite aware of his early weaknesses, and in the maturity of life knew well that he had not been precociously wise. He delighted so to tell his friends, and he delighted also to tell the public, not meaning that any but an inner circle should know that he was speaking of himself. But the story now is plain to all who can read.\*

It was thus that he lost his money; and then, not having prospered very well with his drawing lessons in Paris or elsewhere, he was fain to take up literature as a profession. It is a business which has its allurements. It requires no capital, no special education, no training, and may be taken up at any time without a moment's delay. If a man can command a table, a chair, a pen, paper, and ink, he can commence his trade as a literary man. It is thus that aspirants generally do commence it. A man may or may not have another employment to back him, or means of his own; or—as was the case with Thackeray, when, after his first misadventure, he had to look about him for the means of living—he may have nothing but his intellect and his friends. But the idea comes to the man that as he has the pen and ink, and time on his hand, why should he not write and make money?

It is an idea that comes to very many men and women, old as well

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\* The report that he had lost all his money and was going to live by painting in Paris, was still prevalent in London in 1836. Macready, on the 27th April of that year, says in his *Diary*: "At Garrick Club, where I dined and saw the papers. Met Thackeray, who has spent all his fortune, and is now about to settle in Paris, I believe as an artist." But at this time he was, in truth, turning to literature as a profession.



as young—to many thousands who at last are crushed by it, of whom the world knows nothing. A man can make the attempt though he has not a coat fit to go out into the street with ; or a woman, though she be almost in rags. There is no apprenticeship wanted. Indeed, there is no room for such apprenticeship. It is an art which no one teaches ; there is no professor who, in a dozen lessons, even pretends to show the aspirant how to write a book or an article. If you would be a watchmaker, you must learn ; or a lawyer, a cook, or even a housemaid. Before you can clean a horse you must go into the stable, and begin at the beginning. Even the cab-driving tiro must sit for awhile on the box, and learn something of the streets, before he can ply for a fare. But the literary beginner rushes at once at the top rung of his ladder—as though a youth, having made up his mind to be a clergyman, should demand, without preliminary steps, to be appointed Bishop of London. That he should be able to read and write is presumed, and that only. So much may be presumed of everyone, and nothing more is wanted.

In truth nothing more is wanted—except those inner lights as to which so many men live and die without having learned whether they possess them or not. Practice, industry, study of literature, cultivation of taste, and the rest, will of course lend their aid, will probably be necessary before high excellence is attained. But the instances are not to seek—are at the fingers of us all—in which the first uninstructed effort has succeeded. A boy, almost, or perhaps an old woman, has sat down and the book has come, and the world has read it, and the booksellers have been civil and have written their cheques. When all trades, all professions, all seats at offices, all employments at which a crust can be earned, are so crowded that a young man knows not where to look for the means of livelihood, is there not an attraction in this which to the self-confident must be almost invincible? The booksellers are courteous and write their cheques, but that is not half the whole. *Monstrari digito!* That is obtained. The happy aspirant is written of in newspapers, or, perhaps, better still, he writes of others. When the barrister of forty-five has hardly got a name beyond Chancery Lane, this glorious young scribe, with the first down on his lips, has printed his novel and been talked about.

The temptation is irresistible, and thousands fall into it. How is a man to know that he is not the lucky one or the gifted one? There is the table, and there the pen and ink. Among the unfortunate, he who fails altogether and from the first start is not the most unfortunate. A short period of life is wasted, and a sharp pang is endured. Then the disappointed one is relegated to the condition of life which he would otherwise have filled a little earlier. He has been wounded, but not killed, or even maimed. But he who has a little success, who succeeds in earning a few halcyon, but ah ! so dangerous guineas, is

drawn into a trade from which he will hardly escape till he be driven from it, if he come out alive, by sheer hunger. He hangs on till the guineas become crowns and shillings—till some sad record of his life, made when he applies for charity, declares that he has worked hard for the last year or two, and has earned less than a policeman in the streets or a porter at a railway. It is to that that he is brought by applying himself to a business which requires only a table and chair, with pen, ink, and paper! It is to that which he is brought by venturing to believe that he has been gifted with powers of imagination, creation, and expression.

The young man who makes the attempt knows that he must run the chance. He is well aware that nine must fail where one will make his running good. So much as that does reach his ears, and recommends itself to his common-sense. But why should it not be he as well as another? There is always some lucky one winning the prize. And this prize when it has been won is so well worth the winning! He can endure starvation—so he tells himself—as well as another. He will try. But yet he knows that he has but one chance out of ten in his favour, and it is only in his happier moments that he flatters himself that that remains to him. Then there falls upon him—in the midst of that labour which for its success especially requires that a man's heart shall be light, and that he be always at his best—doubt and despair. If there be no chance, of what use is his labour?

Were it not better done as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,

and amuse himself after that fashion? Thus the very industry which alone could give him a chance is discarded. It is so that the young man feels who, with some slight belief in himself and with many doubts, sits down to commence the literary labour by which he hopes to live.

So it was, no doubt, with Thackeray. Such were his hopes and his fears—with a resolution of which we can well understand that it should have waned at times, of earning his bread, if he did not make his fortune, in the world of literature. One has not to look far for evidence of the condition I have described—that it was so, Amaryllis and all. How or when he made his very first attempt in London, I have not learned; but he had not probably spent his money without forming “press” acquaintances, and had thus formed an aperture for the thin end of the wedge. He wrote for *The Constitutional*, of which he was part proprietor, beginning his work for that paper as a correspondent from Paris. For awhile he was connected with *The Times* newspaper, though his work there did not, I think, amount to much. His first regular employment was on *Fraser's Magazine*, when Mr. Fraser's shop was in Regent Street, when Oliver Yorke

was the presumed editor, and among contributors, Carlyle was one of the most notable. I imagine that the battle of life was difficult enough with him even after he had become one of the leading props of that magazine. All that he wrote was not taken, and all that was taken was not approved. In 1837-38, the *History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond* appeared in the magazine. The *Great Hoggarty Diamond* is now known to all readers of Thackeray's works. It is not my purpose to speak specially of it here, except to assert that it has been thought to be a great success. When it was being brought out, the author told a friend of his—and of mine—that it was not much thought of at Fraser's, and that he had been called upon to shorten it. That is an incident disagreeable in its nature to any literary gentleman, and likely to be specially so when he knows that his provision of bread, certainly of improved bread and butter, is at stake. The man who thus darkens his literary brow with the frown of disapproval, has at his disposal all the loaves and all the fishes that are going. If the writer be successful, there will come a time when he will be above such frowns; but, when that opinion went forth, Thackeray had not yet made his footing good, and the notice to him respecting it must have been very bitter. It was in writing this *Hoggarty Diamond* that Thackeray first invented the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. Samuel Titmarsh was the writer, whereas Michael Angelo was an intending illustrator. Thackeray's nose had been broken in a school fight, while he was quite a little boy, by another little boy, at the Charter House; and there was probably some association intended to be jocose with the name of the great artist, whose nose was broken by his fellow-student Torrigiano, and who, as it happened, died exactly three centuries before Thackeray.

I can understand all the disquietude of his heart when that warning, as to the too great length of his story, was given to him. He was not a man capable of feeling at any time quite assured in his position, and when that occurred he was very far from assurance. I think that at no time did he doubt the sufficiency of his own mental qualification for the work he had taken in hand; but he doubted all else. He doubted the appreciation of the world; he doubted his fitness for turning his intellect to valuable account; he doubted his physical capacity—dreading his own lack of industry; he doubted his luck; he doubted the continual absence of some of those misfortunes on which the works of literary men are shipwrecked. Though he was aware of his own power, he always, to the last, was afraid that his own deficiencies should be too strong against him. It was his nature to be idle—to put off his work—and then to be angry with himself for putting it off. Ginger was hot in the mouth with him, and all the allurements of the world were strong upon him. To find on Monday morning an excuse why he should not on Monday do Monday's work was, at the time, an inexpressible relief to him, but had



become a deep regret—almost a remorse—before the Monday was over. To such a one it was not given to believe in himself with that sturdy rock-bound foundation which we see to have belonged to some men from the earliest struggles of their career. To him, then, must have come an inexpressible pang when he was told that his story must be curtailed.

Who else would have told such a story of himself to the first acquaintance he chanced to meet? Of Thackeray it might be predicted that he certainly would do so. No little wound of the kind ever came to him but what he disclosed it at once. "They have only bought so many of my new book." "Have you seen the abuse of my last number?" "What am I to turn my hand to? They are getting tired of my novels." "They don't read it," he said to me of *Esmond*. "So you don't mean to publish my work?" he said once to a publisher in an open company. Other men keep their little troubles to themselves. I have heard even of authors who have declared how all the publishers were running after their books; I have heard some discourse freely of their fourth and fifth editions; I have known an author to boast of his thousands sold in this country, and his tens of thousands in America; but I never heard anyone else declare that no one would read his *chef-d'œuvre*, and that the world was becoming tired of him. It was he who said, when he was fifty, that a man past fifty should never write a novel.

And yet, as I have said, he was from an early age fully conscious of his own ability. That he was so is to be seen in the handling of many of his early works—in *Barry Lyndon*, for instance, and the *Memoirs of Mr. C. James Yellowplush*. The sound is too certain for doubt of that kind. But he had not then, nor did he ever achieve that assurance of public favour which makes a man confident that his work will be successful. During the years of which we are now speaking Thackeray was a literary Bohemian in this sense—that he never regarded his own status as certain. While performing much of the best of his life's work he was not sure of his market, not certain of his readers, his publishers, or his price; nor was he certain of himself.

It is impossible not to form some contrast between him and Dickens as to this period of his life—a comparison not as to their literary merits, but literary position. Dickens was one year his junior in age, and at this time, viz., 1837-38, had reached almost the zenith of his reputation. *Pickwick* had been published, and *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* were being published. All the world was talking about the young author who was assuming his position with a confidence in his own powers which was fully justified both by his present and future success. It was manifest that he could make, not only his own fortune, but that of his publishers, and that he was a literary hero bound to be worshipped by all literary grades of men,

down to the "devils" of the printing-office. At that time Thackeray, the older man, was still doubting, still hesitating, still struggling. Everyone then had accepted the name of Charles Dickens. That of William Thackeray was hardly known beyond the circle of those who are careful to make themselves acquainted with such matters. It was then the custom, more generally than it is at present, to maintain anonymous writing in magazines. Now, if anything of especial merit be brought out, the name of the author, if not published, is known. It was much less so at the period in question; and as the world of readers began to be acquainted with James Yellowplush, Catherine Hayes, and other heroes and heroines, the names of the author had to be inquired for. I remember myself, when I was already well acquainted with the immortal James, asking who was the writer. The works of Charles Dickens were at that time as well known to be his, and as widely read in England, as those almost of Shakespeare.

It will be said, of course, that this came from the earlier popularity of Dickens. That is of course; but why should it have been so? They had begun to make their effort much at the same time; and if there was any advantage in point of position as they commenced, it was with Thackeray. It might be said that the genius of the one was brighter than that of the other, or, at any rate, that it was more precocious. But after-judgment has, I think, not declared either of the suggestions to be true. I will make no comparison between two such rivals, who were so distinctly different from each, and each of whom, within so very short a period, has come to stand on a pedestal so high—the two exalted to so equal a vocation. And if Dickens showed the best of his power early in life, so did Thackeray the best of his intellect. In no display of mental force did he rise above *Barry Lyndon*. I hardly know how the teller of a narrative shall hope to mount in simply intellectual faculty above the effort there made. In what, then, was the difference? Why was Dickens already a great man when Thackeray was still a literary Bohemian?

The answer is to be found not in the extent or in the nature of the genius of either man, but in the condition of mind—which indeed may be read plainly in their works by those who have eyes to see. The one was steadfast, industrious, full of purpose, never doubting of himself, always putting his best foot foremost and standing firmly on it when he got it there; with no inward trepidation, with no moments in which he was half inclined to think that this race was not for his winning, this goal not to be reached by his struggles. The sympathy of friends was good to him, but he could have done without it. The good opinion which he had of himself was never shaken by adverse criticism; and the criticism on the other side, by which it was exalted, came from the enumeration of the number of copies sold. He was a firm, reliant man, very little prone to change, who, when he had discovered the nature of his own talent, knew how to do the very best with it.

It may almost be said that Thackeray was the very opposite of this. Unsteadfast, idle, changeable of purpose, aware of his own intellect but not trusting it, no man ever failed more generally than he to put his best foot foremost. Full as his works are of pathos, full of humour, full of love and charity, tending, as they always do, to truth and honour, and manly worth and womanly modesty, excelling, as they seem to me to do, most other written precepts that I know, they always seem to lack something that might have been there. There is a touch of vagueness which indicates that his pen was not firm while he was using it. He seems to me to have been dreaming ever of some high flight, and then to have told himself, with a half-broken heart, that it was beyond his power to soar up into those bright regions. I can fancy, as the sheets went from him every day, he told himself, in regard to every sheet, that it was a failure. Dickens was quite sure of his sheets.

"I have got to make it shorter!" Then he would put his hands in his pockets, and stretch himself, and straighten the lines of his face, over which a smile would come, as though this intimation from his editor were the best joke in the world; and he would walk away, with his heart bleeding, and every nerve in an agony. There are none of us who want to have much of his work shortened now.

In 1837 Thackeray married Isabella, daughter of Colonel Matthew Shawe, and from this union there came three daughters, Anne, Jane, and Harriet. The name of the eldest, now Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, who has followed so closely in her father's steps, is a household word to the world of novel readers; the second died as a child; the younger lived to marry Leslie Stephen, who is too well known for me to say more than that he wrote, the other day, the little volume on Dr. Johnson in this series; but she, too, has now followed her father. Of Thackeray's married life what need be said shall be contained in a very few words. It was grievously unhappy; but the misery of it came from God, and was in no wise due to human fault. She became ill, and her mind failed her. There was a period during which he would not believe that her illness was more than illness, and then he clung to her and waited on her with an assiduity of affection which only made his task the more painful to him. At last it became evident that she should live in the companionship of some one with whom her life might be altogether quiet, and she has since been domiciled with a lady with whom she has been happy. Thus she was, after but a few years of married life, taken away from him, and he became, as it were, a widower till the end of his days.

At this period, and indeed for some years after his marriage, his chief literary dependence was on *Fraser's Magazine*. He wrote also at this time in the *New Monthly Magazine*. In 1840 he brought out his *Paris Sketch Book*, as to which he tells us, by a notice printed with the first edition, that half of the sketches had already been pub-



lished in various periodicals. Here he used the name Michael Angelo Titmarsh, as he did also with the *Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*. Dickens had called himself Boz, and clung to the name with persistency as long as the public would permit it. Thackeray's affection for assumed names was more intermittent, though I doubt whether he used his own name altogether till it appeared on the title-page of *Vanity Fair*. About this time began his connection with *Punch*, in which much of his best work appeared. Looking back at our old friend as he used to come out from week to week at this time, we can hardly boast that we used to recognize how good the literary pabulum was that was then given for our consumption. We have to admit that the ordinary reader, as the ordinary picture-seer, requires to be guided by a name. We are moved to absolute admiration by a Raphael or a Hobbema, but hardly till we have learned the name of the painter, or, at any rate, the manner of his painting. I am not sure that all lovers of poetry would recognize a *Lycidas* coming from some hitherto unknown Milton. Gradually the good picture or the fine poem makes its way into the minds of a slowly discerning public. *Punch*, no doubt, became very popular, owing, perhaps, more to Leech, its artist, than to any other single person. Gradually the world of readers began to know that there was a speciality of humour to be found in its pages—fun and sense, satire and good-humour, compressed together in small literary morsels as the nature of its columns required. Gradually the name of Thackeray as one of the band of brethren was buzzed about, and gradually became known as that of the chief of the literary brothers. But during the years in which he did much for *Punch*, say from 1843 to 1853, he was still struggling to make good his footing in literature. They knew him well in the *Punch* office, and no doubt the amount and regularity of the cheques from Messrs. Bradbury and Evans, the then and still owners of that happy periodical, made him aware that he had found for himself a satisfactory career. In "a good day for himself, the journal, and the world, Thackeray found *Punch*." This was said by his old friend Shirley Brooks, who himself lived to be editor of the paper and died in harness, and was said most truly. *Punch* was more congenial to him, and no doubt more generous, than *Fraser*. There was still something of the literary Bohemian about him, but not as it had been before. He was still unfixed, looking out for some higher career, not altogether satisfied to be no more than one of an anonymous band of brothers, even though the brothers were the brothers of *Punch*. We can only imagine what were his thoughts as to himself and that other man, who was then known as the great novelist of the day—of a rivalry with whom he was certainly conscious. *Punch* was very much to him, but it was not quite enough. That must have been very clear to himself as he meditated the beginning of *Vanity Fair*.

Of the contributions to the periodical, the best known now are *The*

*Jnob Papers* and *The Ballads of Policeman X*. But they were very numerous. Of Thackeray as a poet, or maker of verses, I will say a few words in a chapter which will be devoted to his own so-called ballads. Here it seems only necessary to remark that there was not apparently any time in his career at which he began to think seriously of appearing before the public as a poet. Such was the intention early in their career with many of our best known prose writers, with Milton, and Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson, with Scott, Macaulay, and more lately with Matthew Arnold; writers of verse and prose who ultimately prevailed some in one direction, and others in the other. Milton and Goldsmith have been known best as poets, Johnson and Macaulay as writers of prose. But with all of them there has been a distinct effort in each art. Thackeray seems to have tumbled into versification by accident; writing it as amateurs do, a little now and again for his own delectation, and to catch the taste of partial friends. The reader feels that Thackeray would not have begun to print his verses unless the opportunity of doing so had been brought in his way by his doings in prose. And yet he had begun to write verses when he was very young;—at Cambridge, as we have seen, when he contributed more to the fame of Timbuctoo than I think even Tennyson has done—and in his early years at Paris. Here again, though he must have felt the strength of his own mingled humour and pathos, he always struck with an uncertain note till he had gathered strength and confidence by popularity. Good as they generally were, his verses were accidents, written not as a writer writes who claims to be a poet, but as though they might have been the relaxation of a doctor or a barrister.

And so they were. When Thackeray first settled himself in London, to make his living among the magazines and newspapers, I do not imagine that he counted much on his poetic powers. He describes it all in his own dialogue between the pen and the album.

“Since he,” says the pen, speaking of its master, Thackeray;

“ Since he my faithful service did engage,  
To follow him through his queer pilgrimage,  
I’ve drawn and written many a line and page.

“ Caricatures I scribbled have, and rhymes,  
And dinner-cards, and picture pantomimes,  
And many little children’s books at times.

“ I’ve writ the foolish fancy of his brain ;  
The aimless jest that, striking, hath caused pain ;  
The idle word that he’d wish back again.

“ I’ve helped him to pen many a line for bread.”

It was thus he thought of his work. There had been caricatures,

and rhymes, and many little children's books; and then the lines written for his bread, which, except that they were written for *Punch*, was hardly undertaken with a more serious purpose. In all of it there was ample seriousness, had he known it himself. What a tale of the restlessness, of the ambition, of the glory, of the misfortunes of a great country is given in the ballads of Peter the French drummer! Of that brain so full of fancy the pen had lightly written all the fancies. He did not know it when he was doing so, but with that word fancy he has described exactly the gift with which his brain was specially endowed. If a writer be accurate, or sonorous, or witty, or simply pathetic, he may, I think, gauge his own powers. He may do so after experience with something of certainty. But fancy is a gift which the owner of it cannot measure, and the power of which, when he is using it, he cannot himself understand. There is the same lambent flame flickering over everything he did, even the dinner-cards and the picture pantomimes. He did not in the least know what he put into those things. So it was with his verses. It was only by degrees, when he was told of it by others, that he found that they too were of infinite value to him in his profession.

The *Irish Sketch Book* came out in 1843, in which he used, but only half used, the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. He dedicates it to Charles Lever, and in signing the dedication gave his own name. "Laying aside," he says, "for a moment the travelling title of Mr. Titmarsh, let me acknowledge these favours in my own name, and subscribe myself, &c., &c., W. M. Thackeray." So he gradually fell into the declaration of his own identity. In 1844 he made his journey to Turkey and Egypt—*From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, as he called it, still using the old *nom de plume*, but again signing the dedication with his own name. It was now made to the captain of the vessel in which he encountered that famous white squall, in describing which he has shown the wonderful power he had over words.

In 1846 was commenced, in numbers, the novel which first made his name well-known to the world. This was *Vanity Fair*, a work to which it is evident that he devoted all his mind. Up to this time his writings had consisted of short contributions, chiefly of sketches, each intended to stand by itself in the periodical to which it was sent. *Barry Lyndon* had hitherto been the longest; but that and *Catherine Hayes*, and the *Hoggarty Diamond*, though stories continued through various numbers, had not as yet reached the dignity—or at any rate the length—of a three-volume novel. But of late novels had grown to be much longer than those of the old well-known measure. Dickens had stretched his to nearly double the length, and had published them in twenty numbers. The attempt had caught the public taste, and had been pre-eminently successful. The nature of the tale as originated by him was altogether unlike that to which the readers of modern novels had been used. No plot, with an arranged catastrophe



or *dénoûment*, was necessary. Some untying of the various knots of the narrative no doubt were expedient, but these were of the simplest kind, done with the view of giving an end to that which might otherwise be endless. The adventures of a *Pickwick* or a *Nickleby* required very little of a plot, and this mode of telling a story, which might be continued on through any number of pages, as long as the characters were interesting, met with approval.—Thackeray, who had never depended much on his plot in the shorter tales which he had hitherto told, determined to adopt the same form in his first great work, but with these changes :—That as the central character with Dickens had always been made beautiful with unnatural virtue—for who was ever so unselfish as *Pickwick*, so manly and modest as *Nicholas*, or so good a boy as *Oliver*?—so should his centre of interest be in every respect abnormally bad.

As to Thackeray's reason for this—or rather as to that condition of mind which brought about this result—I will say something in a final chapter, in which I will endeavour to describe the nature and effect of his work generally. Here it will be necessary only to declare that, such was the choice he now made of a subject in his first attempt to rise out of a world of small literary contributions, into the more assured position of the author of a work of importance. We are aware that the monthly nurses of periodical literature did not at first smile on the effort. The proprietors of magazines did not see their way to undertake *Vanity Fair*, and the publishers are said to have generally looked shy upon it. At last it was brought out in twenty-four numbers instead of twenty, as with those by Dickens—under the guardian hands of Messrs. Bradbury and Evans. This was completed in 1848, and then it was that, at the age of thirty-seven, Thackeray first achieved for himself a name and reputation through the country. Before this he had been known at *Fraser's* and at the *Punch* office. He was known at the Garrick Club, and had become individually popular among literary men in London. He had made many fast friends, and had been, as it were, found out by persons of distinction. But Jones, and Smith, and Robinson, in Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham, did not know him as they knew Dickens, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Macaulay—not as they knew Landseer, or Stansfeld, or Turner; not as they knew Macready, Charles Kean, or Miss Faucit. In that year, 1848, his name became common in the memoirs of the time. On the 5th of June I find him dining with Macready, to meet Sir J. Wilson, Panizzi, Landseer, and others. A few days afterwards Macready dined with him. “Dined with Thackeray, met the Gordons, Kenyons, Procters, Reeve, Villiers, Evans, Stansfeld, and saw Mrs. Sartoris and S. C. Dance, White H. Goldsmid, in the evening.” Again: “Dined with Forster, having called and taken up Brookfield, met Rintoul, Kenyon, Procter, Kinglake, Alfred Tennyson, Thackeray.” Macready was very accurate in jotting down the names of

those he entertained, who entertained him, or were entertained with him. *Vanity Fair* was coming out, and Thackeray had become one of the personages in literary society. In the January number of 1848 the *Edinburgh Review* had an article on Thackeray's works generally as they were then known. It purports to combine the *Irish Sketch Book*, the *Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, and *Vanity Fair* as far as it had then gone; but it does in truth deal chiefly with the literary merits of the latter. I will quote a passage from the article, as proving in regard to Thackeray's work an opinion which was well founded, and as telling the story of his life as far as it was then known:

"Full many a valuable truth," says the reviewer, "has been sent undulating through the air by men who have lived and died unknown. At this moment the rising generation are supplied with the best of their mental aliment by writers whose names are a dead letter to the mass; and among the most remarkable of these is Michael Angelo Titmarsh, alias William Makepeace Thackeray, author of the *Irish Sketch Book*, of *A Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, of *Jeames's Diary*, of *The Snob Papers* in *Punch*, of *Vanity Fair*, &c., &c.

"Mr. Thackeray is now about thirty-seven years of age, of a good family, and originally intended for the bar. He kept seven or eight terms at Cambridge, but left the university without taking a degree, with the view of becoming an artist; and we well remember, ten or twelve years ago, finding him day after day engaged in copying pictures in the Louvre, in order to qualify himself for his intended profession. It may be doubted, however, whether any degree of assiduity would have enabled him to excel in the money-making branches, for his talent was altogether of the Hogarth kind, and was principally remarkable in the pen-and-ink sketches of character and situation, which he dashed off for the amusement of his friends. At the end of two or three years of desultory application he gave up the notion of becoming a painter, and took to literature. He set up and edited with marked ability a weekly journal, on the plan of *The Athenæum* and *Literary Gazette*, but was unable to compete successfully with such long-established rivals. He then became a regular man of letters—that is, he wrote for respectable magazines and newspapers, until the attention attracted to his contributions in *Fraser's Magazine* and *Punch* emboldened him to start on his own account, and risk an independent publication." Then follows a eulogistic and, as I think, a correct criticism on the book as far as it had gone. There are a few remarks perhaps a little less eulogistic as to some of his minor writings, *The Snob Papers* in particular; and at the end there is a statement with which I think we shall all now agree: "A writer with such a pen and pencil as Mr. Thackeray's is an acquisition of real and high value in our literature."

The reviewer has done his work in a tone friendly to the author,

whom he knew\*—as indeed it may be said that this little book will be written with the same feeling—but the public has already recognized the truth of the review generally. There can be no doubt that Thackeray, though he had hitherto been but a contributor of anonymous pieces to periodicals—to what is generally considered as merely the ephemeral literature of the month—had already become effective on the tastes and morals of readers. Affectation and finery; the vulgarity which apes good breeding but never approaches it: dishonest gambling, whether with dice or with railway shares; and that low taste for literary excitement which is gratified by mysterious murders and Old Bailey executions, had already received condign punishment from Yellowplush, Titmarsh, Fitzboodle, and Ikey Solomon. Under all those names Thackeray had plied his trade as a satirist. Though the truths, as the reviewer said, had been merely sent undulating through the air, they had already become effective.

Thackeray had now become a personage—one of the recognised stars of the literary heaven of the day. It was an honour to know him; and we may well believe that the givers of dinners were proud to have him among their guests. He had opened his oyster with his pen—an achievement which he cannot be said to have accomplished until *Vanity Fair* had come out. In inquiring about him from those who survive him, and knew him well in those days, I always hear the same account. “If I could only tell you the impromptu lines which fell from him!” “If I had only kept the drawings from his pen, which used to be chucked about as though they were worth nothing!” “If I could only remember the drolleries!” Had they been kept, there might now be many volumes of these sketches, as to which the reviewer says that their talent was “altogether of the Hogarth kind.” Could there be any kind more valuable? Like Hogarth, he could always make his picture tell his story; though, unlike Hogarth, he had not learned to draw. I have had sent to me, for my inspection, an album of drawings and letters, which in the course of twenty years, from 1829 to 1849, were despatched from Thackeray to his old friend Edward Fitzgerald. Looking at the wit displayed in the drawings, I feel inclined to say that had he persisted he would have been a second Hogarth. There is a series of ballad scenes, in which “Flore et Zephyr” are the two chief performers, which for expression and drollery exceed anything that I know of the kind. The set in this book are lithographs, which were published, but I do not remember to have seen them elsewhere. There are still among us many who knew him well—Edward Fitzgerald and George Venables, James Spedding and Kinglake, Mrs.

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\* The article was written by Abraham Hayward, who is still with us, and was no doubt instigated by a desire to assist Thackeray in his struggle upwards, in which it succeeded.



Procter—the widow of Barry Cornwall, who loved him well—and Monckton Milnes, as he used to be, whose touching lines written just after Thackeray's death will close this volume, Frederick Pollock and Frank Fladgate, John Blackwood and William Russell—and they all tell the same story. Though he so rarely talked, as good talkers do, and was averse to sit down to work, there were always falling from his mouth and pen those little pearls. Among the friends who had been kindest and dearest to him in the days of his strugglings he once mentioned three to me—Matthew Higgins, or Jacob Omnium, as he was more popularly called; William Stirling, who became Sir William Maxwell; and Russell Sturgis, who is now the senior partner in the great House of Barings. Alas, only the last of these three is left among us! Thackeray was a man of no great power of conversation. I doubt whether he ever shone in what is called general society. He was not a man to be valuable at a dinner-table as a good talker. It was when there were but two or three together that he was happy himself and made others happy; and then it would rather be from some special piece of drollery that the joy of the moment would come, than from the discussion of ordinary topics. After so many years his old friends remember the fag-ends of the doggerel lines which used to drop from him without any effort on all occasions of jollity. And though he could be very sad—laden with melancholy, as I think must have been the case with him always—the feeling of fun would quickly come to him, and the queer rhymes would be poured out as plentifully as the sketches were made. Here is a contribution which I find hanging in the memory of an old friend, the serious nature of whose literary labours would certainly have driven such lines from his mind, had they not at the time caught fast hold of him:

“In the romantic little town of Highbury  
My father kept a circulatin' library;  
He followed in his youth that man immortal, who  
Conquered the Frenchmen on the plains of Waterloo.

“Mamma was an inhabitant of Drogheda,  
Very good she was to darn and to embroider.  
In the famous island of Jamaica,  
For thirty years I've been a sugar-baker;  
And here I sit, the Muses' 'appy vot'ry,  
A cultivatin' every kind of po'try.”

There may, perhaps, have been a mistake in a line, but the poem has been handed down with fair correctness over a period of forty years. He was always versifying. He once owed me five pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, his share of a dinner bill at Richmond. He sent me a cheque for the amount in rhyme, giving the proper financial document on the second half of a sheet of note-paper. I

gave the poem away as an autograph, and now forget the lines. This was all trifling, the reader will say. No doubt. Thackeray was always trifling, and yet always serious. In attempting to understand his character it is necessary for you to bear within your own mind the idea that he was always, within his own bosom, encountering melancholy with buffoonery, and meanness with satire. The very spirit of burlesque dwelt within him—a spirit which does not see the grand the less because of the travesties which it is always engendering.

In his youthful—all but boyish—days in London, he delighted to “put himself up” at the Bedford, in Covent Garden. Then, in his early married days, he lived in Albion Street, and from thence went to Great Coram Street, till his household there was broken up by his wife’s illness. He afterwards took lodgings in St. James’s Chambers, and then a house in Young Street, Kensington. Here he lived from 1847, when he was achieving his great triumph with *Vanity Fair*, down to 1853, when he removed to a house which he bought in Onslow Square. In Young Street there had come to lodge opposite to him an Irish gentleman, who, on the part of his injured country, felt very angry with Thackeray. *The Irish Sketch Book* had not been complimentary, nor were the descriptions which Thackeray had given generally of Irishmen; and there was extant an absurd idea that in his abominable heroine Catherine Hayes he had alluded to Miss Catherine Hayes, the Irish singer. Word was taken to Thackeray that this Irishman intended to come across the street and avenge his country on the calumniator’s person. Thackeray immediately called upon the gentleman, and it is said that the visit was pleasant to both parties. There certainly was no blood shed.

He had now succeeded—in 1848—in making for himself a standing as a man of letters, and an income. What was the extent of his income I have no means of saying; nor is it a subject on which, as I think, inquiry should be made. But he was not satisfied with his position. He felt it to be precarious, and he was always thinking of what he owed to his two girls. That *arbitrium popularis aure* on which he depended for his daily bread was not regarded by him with the confidence which it deserved. He did not, probably, know how firm was the hold he had obtained of the public ear. At any rate he was anxious, and endeavoured to secure for himself a permanent income in the public service. He had become by this time acquainted, probably intimate, with the Marquis of Clanricarde, who was then Postmaster General. In 1848 there fell a vacancy in the situation of Assistant-Secretary at the General Post-Office, and Lord Clanricarde either offered it to him or promised to give it to him. The Postmaster-General had the disposal of the place, but was not altogether free from control in the matter. When he made known his purpose at the Post-Office, he was met by an assurance from the officer next under

him that the thing could not be done. The services were wanted of a man who had had experience in the Post-Office; and, moreover, it was necessary that the feelings of other gentlemen should be consulted. Men who have been serving in an office many years do not like to see even a man of genius put over their heads. In fact, the office would have been up in arms at such an injustice. Lord Clanricarde, who in a matter of patronage was not scrupulous, was still a good-natured man and amenable. He attempted to befriend his friend till he found that it was impossible, and then, with the best grace in the world, accepted the official nominee that was offered to him.

It may be said that had Thackeray succeeded in that attempt he would surely have ruined himself. No man can be fit for the management and performance of special work who has learned nothing of it before his thirty-seventh year; and no man could have been less so than Thackeray. There are men who though they be not fit, are disposed to learn their lesson and make themselves as fit as possible. Such cannot be said to have been the case with this man. For the special duties which he would have been called upon to perform, consisting to a great extent of the maintenance of discipline over a large body of men, training is required, and the service would have suffered for awhile under any untried elderly tiro. Another man might have put himself into harness. Thackeray never would have done so. The details of his work after the first month would have been inexpressibly wearisome to him. To have gone into the city, and to have remained there every day from eleven till five, would have been all but impossible to him. He would not have done it. And then he would have been tormented by the feeling that he was taking the pay and not doing the work. There is a belief current, not confined to a few, that a man may be a Government Secretary with a generous salary, and have nothing to do. The idea is something that remains to us from the old days of sinecures. If there be now remaining places so pleasant, or gentlemen so happy, I do not know them. Thackeray's notion of his future duties was probably very vague. He would have repudiated the notion that he was looking for a sinecure, but no doubt considered that the duties would be easy and light. It is not too much to assert, that he who could drop his pearls as I have said above, throwing them wide cast without an effort, would have found his work as Assistant-Secretary at the General Post-Office to be altogether too much for him. And then it was no doubt his intention to join literature with the Civil Service. He had been taught to regard the Civil Service as easy, and had counted upon himself as able to add it to his novels, and his work with his *Punch* brethren, and to his contributions generally to the literature of the day. He might have done so, could he have risen at five, and have sat at his private desk for three hours before he began his official routine at the public one. A capability for grinding, an aptitude for continuous task work, a dis-



position to sit in one's chair as though fixed to it by cobbler's wax, will enable a man in the prime of life to go through the tedium of a second day's work every day ; but of all men Thackeray was the last to bear the wearisome perseverance of such a life. Some more or less continuous attendance at his office he must have given, and with it would have gone *Punch* and the novels, the ballads, the burlesques, the essays, the lectures, and the monthly papers full of mingled satire and tenderness, which have left to us that Thackeray which we could so ill afford to lose out of the literature of the nineteenth century. And there would have remained to the Civil Service the memory of a disgraceful job.

He did not, however, give up the idea of the Civil Service. In a letter to his American friend, Mr. Reed, dated 8th November, 1854, he says : " The secretaryship of our Legation at Washington was vacant the other day, and I instantly asked for it ; but in the very kindest letter Lord Clarendon showed how the petition was impossible. First, the place was given away. ' Next, it would not be fair to appoint out of the service. ' But the first was an excellent reason—not a doubt of it." The validity of the second was probably not so apparent to him as it is to one who has himself waited long for promotion. " So if ever I come," he continues, " as I hope and trust to do this time next year, it must be in my own coat, and not the Queen's." Certainly in his own coat, and not in the Queen's, must Thackeray do anything by which he could mend his fortune or make his reputation. There never was a man less fit for the Queen's coat.

Nevertheless he held strong ideas that much was due by the Queen's ministers to men of letters, and no doubt had his feelings of slighted merit, because no part of the debt due was paid to him. In 1850 he wrote a letter to *The Morning Chronicle*, which has since been republished, in which he alludes to certain opinions which had been put forth in *The Examiner*. " I don't see," he says, " why men of letters should not very cheerfully coincide with Mr. Examiner in accepting all the honours, places, and prizes which they can get. The amount of such as will be awarded to them will not, we may be pretty sure, impoverish the country much ; and if it is the custom of the State to reward by money, or titles of honour, or stars and garters of any sort, individuals who do the country service—and if individuals are gratified at having ' Sir ' or ' My lord ' appended to their names, or stars and ribbons hooked on to their coats and waistcoats, as men most undoubtedly are, and as their wives, families, and relations are—there can be no reason why men of letters should not have the chance as well as men of the robe or the sword ; or why, if honour and money are good for one profession, they should not be good for another. No man in other callings thinks himself degraded by receiving a reward from his Government ; nor, surely, need the literary man be more squeamish about pensions, and ribbons, and titles, than

the ambassador, or general, or judge. Every European state but ours rewards its men of letters. The American Government gives them their full share of its small patronage; and if Americans, why not Englishmen?"

In this a great subject is discussed which would be too long for these pages; but I think that there now exists a feeling that literature can herself, for herself, produce a rank as effective as any that a Queen's minister can bestow. Surely it would be a repainting of the lily, an adding a flavour to the rose, a gilding of refined gold to create to-morrow a Lord Viscount Tennyson, a Baron Carlyle, or a Right Honourable Sir Robert Browning. And as for pay and pension, the less the better of it for any profession, unless so far as it may be payment made for work done. Then the higher the payment the better, in literature as in all other trades. It may be doubted even whether a special rank of its own be good for literature, such as that which is achieved by the happy possessors of the forty chairs of the Academy in France. Even though they had an angel to make the choice—which they have not—that angel would do more harm to the excluded than good to the selected.

*Pendennis*, *Esmond*, and *The Newcomes* followed *Vanity Fair*—not very quickly indeed, always at an interval of two years—in 1850, 1852, and 1854. As I purpose to devote a separate short chapter, or part of a chapter, to each of these, I need say nothing here of their special merits or demerits. *Esmond* was brought out as a whole. The others appeared in numbers. "He lisped in numbers, for the numbers came." It is a mode of pronunciation in literature by no means very articulate, but easy of production and lucrative. But though easy it is seductive, and leads to idleness. An author by means of it can raise money and reputation on his book before he has written it, and when the pang of parturition is over in regard to one part, he feels himself entitled to a period of ease because the amount required for the next division will occupy him only half the month. This to Thackeray was so alluring that the entirety of the final half was not always given to the task. His self-reproaches and bemoanings when sometimes the day for reappearing would come terribly nigh, while yet the necessary amount of copy was far from being ready, were often very ludicrous and very sad—ludicrous because he never told of his distress without adding to it something of ridicule which was irresistible, and sad because those who loved him best were aware that physical suffering had already fallen upon him, and that he was deterred by illness from the exercise of continuous energy. I myself did not know him till after the time now in question. My acquaintance with him was quite late in his life. But he has told me something of it, and I have heard from those who lived with him how continual were his sufferings. In 1854 he says in one of his letters to Mr. Reed—the only private letters of his which I

know to have been published: "I am to-day just out of bed after another, about the dozenth, severe fit of spasms which I have had this year. My book would have been written but for them." His work was always going on, but though not fuller of matter—that would have been almost impossible—would have been better in manner had he been delayed neither by suffering nor by that paralyzing of the energies which suffering produces.

This ought to have been the happiest period of his life, and should have been very happy. He had become fairly easy in his circumstances. He had succeeded in his work, and had made for himself a great name. He was fond of popularity, and especially anxious to be loved by a small circle of friends. These good things he had thoroughly achieved. Immediately after the publication of *Vanity Fair* he stood high among the literary heroes of his country, and had endeared himself especially to a special knot of friends. His face and figure, his six feet four in height, with his flowing hair, already nearly gray, and his broken nose, his broad forehead and ample chest, encountered everywhere either love or respect; and his daughters to him were all the world—the bairns of whom he says, at the end of the *White Squall* ballad:

"I thought, as day was breaking,  
My little girls were waking,  
And smiling, and making  
A prayer at home for me."

Nothing could have been more tender or endearing than his relations with his children. But still there was a skeleton in his cupboard—or rather two skeletons. His home had been broken up by his wife's malady, and his own health was shattered. When he was writing *Pendennis*, in 1849, he had a severe fever, and then those spasms came, of which four or five years afterwards he wrote to Mr. Reed. His home, as a home should be, was never restored to him—or his health. Just at that period of life at which a man generally makes a happy exchange in taking his wife's drawing-room in lieu of the smoking-room of his club, and assumes those domestic ways of living which are becoming and pleasant for matured years, that drawing-room and those domestic ways were closed against him. The children were then no more than babies, as far as society was concerned—things to kiss and play with, and make a home happy if they could only have had their mother with them. I have no doubt there were those who thought that Thackeray was very jolly under his adversity. Jolly he was. It was the manner of the man to be so—if that continual playfulness which was natural to him, lying over a melancholy which was as continual, be compatible with jollity. He laughed, and ate, and drank, and threw his pearls about with miraculous profusion. But I fancy that he was far from happy. I remember once, when I was young, receiving advice as to the manner in which I had



better spend my evenings ; I was told that I ought to go home, drink tea, and read good books. It was excellent advice, but I found that the reading of good books in solitude was not an occupation congenial to me. It was so, I take it, with Thackeray. He did not like his lonely drawing-room, and went back to his life among the clubs by no means with contentment.

In 1853, Thackeray having then his own two girls to provide for, added a third to his family, and adopted Amy Crowe, the daughter of an old friend, and sister of the well-known artist now among us. How it came to pass that she wanted a home, or that this special home suited her, it would be unnecessary here to tell even if I knew. But that he did give a home to this young lady, making her in all respects the same as another daughter, should be told of him. He was a man who liked to broaden his back for the support of others, and to make himself easy under such burdens. In 1862, she married a Thackeray cousin, a young officer with the Victoria cross, Edward Thackeray, and went out to India, where she died.

In 1854, the year in which *The Newcomes* came out, Thackeray had broken his close alliance with *Punch*. In December of that year there appeared from his pen an article in *The Quarterly* on *John Leech's Pictures of Life and Character*. It is a rambling discourse on picture-illustration in general, full of interest, but hardly good as a criticism—a portion of literary work for which he was not specially fitted. In it he tells us how Richard Doyle, the artist, had given up his work for *Punch*, not having been able, as a Roman Catholic, to endure the skits which, at that time, were appearing in one number after another against what was then called Papal aggression. The reviewer—Thackeray himself—then tells us of the secession of himself from the board of brethren. “Another member of Mr. Punch’s cabinet, the biographer of *Jeames*, the author of *The Snob Papers*, resigned his functions, on account of Mr. Punch’s assaults upon the present Emperor of the French nation, whose anger *Jeames* thought it was unpatriotic to arouse.” How hard it must be for Cabinets to agree ! This man or that is sure to have some pet conviction of his own, and the better the man the stronger the conviction ! Then the reviewer went on in favour of the artist of whom he was specially speaking, making a comparison which must at the time have been odious enough to some of the brethren. “There can be no blinking the fact that in Mr. Punch’s Cabinet John Leech is the right-hand man. Fancy a number of *Punch* without Leech’s pictures ! What would you give for it ?” Then he breaks out into strong admiration of that one friend—perhaps with a little disregard as to the feelings of other friends.\* This *Critical Review*, if it may properly be so

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\* For a week there existed at the *Punch* office a grudge against Thackeray in reference to this awkward question : “What would you give for your *Punch* without John Leech ?” Then he asked the confraternity to dinner—*more Thackerayano*—

called—at any rate it is so named as now published—is to be found in our author's collected works, in the same volume with *Catherine*. It is there preceded by another, from *The Westminster Review*, written fourteen years earlier, on *The Genius of Cruikshank*. This contains a descriptive catalogue of Cruikshank's works up to that period, and is interesting, from the piquant style in which it is written. I fancy that these two are the only efforts of the kind which he made—and in both he dealt with the two great caricaturists of his time, he himself being, in the imaginative part of a caricaturist's work, equal in power to either of them.

We now come to a phase of Thackeray's life in which he achieved a remarkable success, attributable rather to his fame as a writer than to any particular excellence in the art which he then exercised. He took upon himself the functions of a lecturer, being moved to do so by a hope that he might thus provide a sum of money for the future sustenance of his children. No doubt he had been advised to this course, though I do not know from whom specially the advice may have come. Dickens had already considered the subject, but had not yet consented to read in public for money on his own account. John Forster, writing of the year 1846, says of Dickens and the then only thought-of exercise of a new profession: "I continued to oppose, for reasons to be stated in their place, that which he had set his heart upon too strongly to abandon, and which I still can wish he had preferred to surrender with all that seemed to be its enormous gain." And again he says, speaking of a proposition which had been made to Dickens from the town of Bradford: "At first this was entertained, but was abandoned, with some reluctance, upon the argument that to become publicly a reader must alter, without improving, his position publicly as a writer, and that it was a change to be justified only when the higher calling should have failed of the old success." The meaning of this was that the money to be made would be sweet, but that the descent to a profession which was considered to be lower than that of literature itself would carry with it something that was bitter. It was as though one who had sat on the Woolsack as Lord Chancellor should raise the question whether, for the sake of the income attached to it, he might, without disgrace, occupy a seat on a lower bench; as though an architect should consider with himself the propriety of making his fortune as a contractor; or the head of a college lower his dignity, while he increased his finances, by taking pupils. When such discussions arise, money generally carries the day—and should do so. When convinced that money may be earned without disgrace, we ought to allow money to carry the day. When we talk of sordid gain and filthy lucre, we are gen-

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and the confraternity came. Who can doubt but they were very jolly over the little blunder? Four years afterwards Thackeray was a guest at the well-known *Punch* dinner, though he was no longer one of the contributors.

erally hypocrites. If gains be sordid and lucre filthy, where is the priest, the lawyer, the doctor, or the man of literature, who does not wish for dirty hands? An income, and the power of putting by something for old age, something for those who are to come after, is the wholesome and acknowledged desire of all professional men. Thackeray having children, and being gifted with no power of making his money go very far, was anxious enough on the subject. We may say now, that had he confined himself to his pen he would not have wanted while he lived, but would have left but little behind him. That he was anxious we have seen, by his attempts to subsidize his literary gains by a Government office. I cannot but think that had he undertaken public duties for which he was ill qualified, and received a salary which he could hardly have earned, he would have done less for his fame than by reading to the public. Whether he did that well or ill, he did it well enough for the money. The people who heard him, and who paid for their seats, were satisfied with their bargain—as they were also in the case of Dickens; and I venture to say that in becoming publicly a reader, neither did Dickens or Thackeray “alter his position as a writer,” and “that it was a change to be justified,” though the success of the old calling had in no degree waned. What Thackeray did enabled him to leave a comfortable income for his children, and one earned honestly, with the full approval of the world around him.

Having saturated his mind with the literature of Queen Anne's time—not probably, in the first instance, as a preparation for *Esmond*, but in such a way as to induce him to create an *Esmond*—he took the authors whom he knew so well as the subject for his first series of lectures. He wrote *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* in 1851, while he must have been at work on *Esmond*, and first delivered the course at Willis's Rooms in that year. He afterwards went with these through many of our provincial towns, and then carried them to the United States, where he delivered them to large audiences in the winter of 1852 and 1853. Some few words as to the merits of the composition I will endeavour to say in another place. I myself never heard him lecture, and can therefore give no opinion of the performance. That which I have heard from others has been very various. It is, I think, certain that he had none of those wonderful gifts of elocution which made it a pleasure to listen to Dickens, whatever he read or whatever he said; nor had he that power of application by using which his rival taught himself with accuracy the exact effect to be given to every word. The rendering of a piece by Dickens was composed as an oratorio is composed, and was then studied by heart as music is studied. And the piece was all given by memory, without any looking at the notes or words. There was nothing of this with Thackeray. But the thing read was in itself of great interest to educated people. The words were



given clearly, with sufficient intonation for easy understanding, so that they who were willing to hear something from him felt on hearing that they had received full value for their money. At any rate, the lectures were successful. The money was made—and was kept.

He came from his first trip to America to his new house in Onslow Square, and then published *The Newcomes*. This, too, was one of his great works, as to which I shall have to speak hereafter. Then, having enjoyed his success in the first attempt to lecture, he prepared a second series. He never essayed the kind of reading which with Dickens became so wonderfully popular. Dickens recited portions from his well-known works. Thackeray wrote his lectures expressly for the purpose. They have since been added to his other literature, but they were prepared as lectures. The second series were *The Four Georges*. In a lucrative point of view they were even more successful than the first, the sum of money realised in the United States having been considerable. In England they were less popular, even if better attended, the subject chosen having been distasteful to many. There arose the question whether too much freedom had been taken with an office which, though it be no longer considered to be founded on divine right, is still as sacred as can be anything that is human. If there is to remain among us a sovereign, that sovereign, even though divested of political power, should be endowed with all that personal respect can give. If we wish ourselves to be high, we should treat that which is over us as high. And this should not depend altogether on personal character, though we know—as we have reason to know—how much may be added to the firmness of the feeling by personal merit. The respect of which we speak should, in the strongest degree, be in possession of the immediate occupant, and will naturally become dim—or perhaps be exaggerated—in regard to the past, as history or fable may tell of them. No one need hesitate to speak his mind of King John, let him be ever so strong a stickler for the privileges of majesty. But there are degrees of distance, and the throne of which we wish to preserve the dignity seems to be assailed when unmeasured evil is said of one who has sat there within our own memory. There would seem to each of us to be a personal affront were a departed relative delineated with all those faults by which we must own that even our near relatives have been made imperfect. It is a general conviction as to this which so frequently turns the biography of those recently dead into mere eulogy. The fictitious charity which is enjoined by the *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* banishes truth. The feeling of which I speak almost leads me at this moment to put down my pen. And, if so much be due to all subjects, is less due to a sovereign?

Considerations such as these diminished, I think, the popularity of Thackeray's second series of lectures : or rather, not their popularity, but the estimation in which they were held. On this head he de-

rended himself more than once very gallantly, and had a great deal to say on his side of the question. "Suppose, for example, in America—in Philadelphia or in New York—that I had spoken about George IV. in terms of praise and affected reverence, do you believe they would have hailed his name with cheers, or have heard it with anything of respect?" And again: "We degrade our own honour and the sovereign's by unduly and unjustly praising him: and the mere slaverer and flatterer is one who comes forward, as it were, with flash notes, and pays with false coin his tribute to Cæsar. I don't disguise that I feel somehow on my trial here for loyalty—for honest English feeling." This was said by Thackeray at a dinner at Edinburgh, in 1857, and shows how the matter rested on his mind. Thackeray's loyalty was no doubt true enough, but was mixed with but little of reverence. He was one who revered modesty and innocence rather than power, against which he had in the bottom of his heart something of republican tendency. His leaning was no doubt of the more manly kind. But in what he said at Edinburgh he hardly hit the nail on the head. No one had suggested that he should have said good things of a king which he did not believe to be true. The question was whether it may not be well sometimes for us to hold our tongues. An American literary man, here in England, would not lecture on the morals of Hamilton, on the manners of General Jackson, on the general amenities of President Johnson.

In 1857, Thackeray stood for Oxford, in the Liberal interest, in opposition to Mr. Cardwell. He had been induced to do this by his old friend Charles Neate, who himself twice sat for Oxford, and died now not many months since. He polled 1017 votes, against 1070 by Mr. Cardwell; and was thus again saved by his good fortune from attempting to fill a situation in which he would not have shone. There are, no doubt, many to whom a seat in Parliament comes almost as the birthright of a well-born and well-to-do English gentleman. They go there with no more idea of shining than they do when they are elected to a first-class club—hardly with more idea of being useful. It is the thing to do, and the House of Commons the place where a man ought to be—for a certain number of hours. Such men neither succeed nor fail, for nothing is expected of them. From such a one as Thackeray something would have been expected, which would not have been forthcoming. He was too desultory for regular work—full of thought, but too vague for practical questions. He could not have endured to sit for two or three hours at a time with his hat over his eyes, pretending to listen, as is the duty of a good legislator. He was a man intolerant of tedium, and in the best of his time impatient of slow work. Nor, though his liberal feelings were very strong, were his political convictions definite or accurate. He was a man who mentally drank in much, feeding his fancy hourly with what he saw, what he heard, what he read, and then pouring it all out with an immense

power of amplification. But it would have been impossible for him to study and bring home to himself the various points of a complicated bill with a hundred and fifty clauses. In becoming a man of letters, and taking that branch of letters which fell to him, he obtained the special place that was fitted for him. He was a round peg in a round hole. There was no other hole which he would have fitted nearly so well. But he had his moment of political ambition, like others, and paid a thousand pounds for his attempt.

In 1857 the first number of the *Virginians* appeared; and the last—the twenty-fourth—in October, 1859. This novel, as all my readers are aware, is a continuance of *Esmond*, and will be spoken of in its proper place. He was then forty-eight years old, very gray, with much of age upon him, which had come from suffering—age shown by dislike of activity and by an old man's way of thinking about many things—speaking as though the world were all behind him instead of before; but still with a stalwart outward bearing very erect in his gait, and a countenance peculiarly expressive and capable of much dignity. I speak of his personal appearance at this time, because it was then only that I became acquainted with him. In 1859 he undertook the last great work of his life, the editorship of *The Cornhill Magazine*, a periodical set on foot by Mr. George Smith, of the house of Smith and Elder, with an amount of energy greater than has generally been bestowed upon such enterprises. It will be well remembered still how much *The Cornhill* was talked about and thought of before it first appeared, and how much of that thinking and talking was due to the fact that Mr. Thackeray was to edit it. *Macmillan's*, I think, was the first of the shilling magazines, having preceded *The Cornhill* by a month, and it would ill become me, who have been a humble servant to each of them, to give to either any preference. But it must be acknowledged that a great deal was expected from *The Cornhill*, and I think it will be confessed that it was the general opinion that a great deal was given by it. Thackeray had become big enough to give a special *éclat* to any literary exploit to which he attached himself. Since the days of *The Constitutional* he had fought his way up the ladder, and knew how to take his stand there with an assurance of success. When it became known to the world of readers that a new magazine was to appear under Thackeray's editorship, the world of readers was quite sure that there would be a large sale. Of the first number over one hundred and ten thousand were sold, and of the second and third over one hundred thousand. It is in the nature of such things that the sale should fall off when the novelty is over. People believe that a new delight has come, a new joy forever, and then find that the joy is not quite so perfect or enduring as they had expected. But the commencement of such enterprises may be taken as a measure of what will follow. The magazine, either by Thackeray's name or by its intrinsic merits—probably by both—



achieved a great success. My acquaintance with him grew from my having been one of his staff from the first.

About two months before the opening day I wrote to him suggesting that he should accept from me a series of four short stories on which I was engaged. I got back a long letter in which he said nothing about my short stories, but asking whether I could go to work at once and let him have a long novel, so that it might begin with the first number. At the same time I heard from the publisher, who suggested some interesting little details as to honorarium. The little details were very interesting, but absolutely no time was allowed to me. It was required that the first portion of my book should be in the printer's hands within a month. Now it was my theory—and ever since this occurrence has been my practice—to see the end of my own work before the public should see the commencement.\* If I did this thing I must not only abandon my theory, but instantly contrive a story, or begin to write it before it was contrived. That was what I did, urged by the interesting nature of the details. A novelist cannot always at the spur of the moment make his plot and create his characters who shall, with an arranged sequence of events, live with a certain degree of eventful decorum, through that portion of their lives which is to be portrayed. I hesitated, but allowed myself to be allured to what I felt to be wrong, much dreading the event. How seldom is it that theories stand the wear and tear of practice! I will not say that the story which came was good, but it was received with greater favour than any I had written before or have written since. I think that almost anything would have been then accepted coming under Thackeray's editorship.

I was astonished that work should be required in such haste, knowing that much preparation had been made, and that the service of almost any English novelist might have been obtained if asked for in due time. It was my readiness that was needed, rather than any other gift! The riddle was read to me after a time. Thackeray had himself intended to begin with one of his own great novels, but had put it off till it was too late. *Lovel the Widower* was commenced at the same time with my own story, but *Lovel the Widower* was not substantial enough to appear as the principal joint at the banquet. Though your guests will undoubtedly dine off the little delicacies you provide for them, there must be a heavy saddle of mutton among the viands prepared. I was the saddle of mutton, Thackeray having omitted to get his joint down to the fire in time enough. My fitness lay in my capacity for quick roasting.

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\* I had begun an Irish story and half finished it, which would reach just the required length. Would that do? I asked. I was civilly told that my Irish story would no doubt be charming, but was not quite the thing that was wanted. Could I not begin a new one—English—and if possible about clergymen? The details were

It may be interesting to give a list of the contributors to the first number. My novel called *Framley Parsonage* came first. At this banquet the saddle of mutton was served before the delicacies. Then there was a paper by Sir John Bowring on *The Chinese and Outer Barbarians*. The commencing number of *Lovel the Widower* followed. George Lewes came next with his first chapters of *Studies in Animal Life*. Then there was Father Prout's *Inauguration Ode*, dedicated to the author of *Vanity Fair*—which should have led the way. I need hardly say that Father Prout was the Rev. F. Mahony. Then followed *Our Volunteers*, by Sir John Burgoyne; *A Man of Letters of the Last Generation*, by Thornton Hunt; *The Search for Sir John Franklin*, from a private journal of an officer of the Fox, now Sir Allen Young; and *The First Morning of 1860*, by Mrs. Archer Clive. The number was concluded by the first of those *Roundabout Papers* by Thackeray himself, which became so delightful a portion of the literature of *The Cornhill Magazine*.

It would be out of my power, and hardly interesting, to give an entire list of those who wrote for *The Cornhill* under Thackeray's editorial direction. But I may name a few, to show how strong was the support which he received. Those who contributed to the first number I have named. Among those who followed were Alfred Tennyson, Jacob Omnium, Lord Houghton, William Russell, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, Mrs. Browning, Robert Bell, George Augustus Sala, Mrs. Gaskell, James Hinton, Mary Howitt, John Kaye, Charles Lever, Frederick Locker, Laurence Oliphant, John Ruskin, Fitzjames Stephen, T. A. Trollope, Henry Thompson, Herman Merivale, Adelaide Proctor, Matthew Arnold, the present Lord Lytton, and Miss Thackeray, now Mrs. Ritchie. Thackeray continued the editorship for two years and four months, namely, up to April, 1863; but, as all readers will remember, he continued to write for it till he died, the day before Christmas Day, in 1863. His last contribution was, I think, a paper written for and published in the November number, called "*Strange to say on Club Paper*," in which he vindicated Lord Clyde from the accusation of having taken the club stationery home with him. It was not a great subject, for no one could or did believe that the Field-Marshal had been guilty of any meanness; but the handling of it has made it interesting, and his indignation has made it beautiful.

The magazine was a great success, but justice compels me to say that Thackeray was not a good editor. As he would have been an indifferent civil servant, an indifferent member of Parliament, so was he perfunctory as an editor. It has sometimes been thought well to select a popular literary man as an editor; first, because his name will attract, and then with an idea that he who can write well

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so interesting that had a couple of archbishops been demanded, I should have produced them.

himself will be a competent judge of the writings of others. The first may sell a magazine, but will hardly make it good; and the second will not avail much, unless the editor so situated be patient enough to read what is sent to him. Of a magazine editor it is required that he should be patient, scrupulous, judicious, but above all things hard-hearted. I think it may be doubted whether Thackeray did bring himself to read the basketfuls of manuscripts with which he was deluged, but he probably did, sooner or later, read the touching little private notes by which they were accompanied—the heart-rending appeals, in which he was told that if this or the other little article could be accepted and paid for, a starving family might be saved from starvation for a month. He tells us how he felt on receiving such letters in one of his *Roundabout Papers*, which he calls “*Thorns in the cushion.*” “How am I to know,” he says—“though to be sure I begin to know now—as I take the letters off the tray, which of those envelopes contains a real *bona fide* letter, and which a thorn? One of the best invitations this year I mistook for a thorn letter, and kept it without opening.” Then he gives the sample of a thorn letter. It is from a governess with a poem, and with a prayer for insertion and payment. “We have known better days, sir. I have a sick and widowed mother to maintain, and little brothers and sisters who look to me.” He could not stand this, and the money would be sent, out of his own pocket, though the poem might be—postponed, till happily it should be lost.

From such material a good editor could not be made. Nor, in truth, do I think that he did much of the editorial work. I had once made an arrangement, not with Thackeray, but with the proprietors, as to some little story. The story was sent back to me by Thackeray—rejected. *Virginibus puerisque!* That was the gist of his objection. There was a project in a gentleman’s mind—as told in my story—to run away with a married woman! Thackeray’s letter was very kind, very regretful—full of apology for such treatment to such a contributor. But—*Virginibus puerisque!* I was quite sure that Thackeray had not taken the trouble to read the story himself. Some moral deputy had read it, and disapproving, no doubt properly, of the little project to which I have alluded, had incited the editor to use his authority. That Thackeray had suffered when he wrote it was easy to see, fearing that he was giving pain to one he would fain have pleased. I wrote him a long letter in return, as full of drollery as I knew how to make it. In four or five days there came a reply in the same spirit—boiling over with fun. He had kept my letter by him, not daring to open it—as he says that he did with that eligible invitation. At last he had given it to one of his girls to examine—to see whether the thorn would be too sharp, whether I had turned upon him with reproaches. A man so susceptible, so prone to work by fits and starts, so unmethodical, could not have been a good editor.



In 1862 he went into the new house which he had built for himself at Palace Green. I remember well, while this was still being built, how his friends used to discuss his imprudence in building it. Though he had done well with himself, and had made and was making a large income, was he entitled to live in a house the rent of which could not be counted at less than from five hundred to six hundred pounds a year? Before he had been there two years, he solved the question by dying—when the house was sold for two thousand pounds more than it had cost. He himself, in speaking of his project, was wont to declare that he was laying out his money in the best way he could for the interest of his children; and it turned out that he was right.

In 1863 he died in the house which he had built, and at the period of his death was writing a new novel in numbers, called *Denis Duval*. In *The Cornhill*, *The Adventures of Phillip* had appeared. This new enterprise was destined for commencement on 1st January, 1864, and, though the writer was gone, it kept its promise, as far as it went. Three numbers, and what might probably have been intended for half of a fourth, appeared. It may be seen, therefore, that he by no means held to my theory, that the author should see the end of his work before the public sees the commencement. But neither did Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell, both of whom died with stories not completed, which, when they died, were in the course of publication. All the evidence goes against the necessity of such precaution. Nevertheless, were I giving advice to a tiro in novel writing, I should recommend it.

With the last chapter of *Denis Duval* was published in the magazine a set of notes on the book, taken for the most part from Thackeray's own papers, and showing how much collateral work he had given to the fabrication of his novel. No doubt in preparing other tales, especially *Esmond*, a very large amount of such collateral labour was found necessary. He was a man who did very much of such work, delighting to deal in little historical incidents. They will be found in almost everything that he did, and I do not know that he was ever accused of gross mistakes. But I doubt whether on that account he should be called a laborious man. He could go down to Winchelsea, when writing about the little town, to see in which way the streets lay, and to provide himself with what we call local colouring. He could jot down the suggestions, as they came to his mind, of his future story. There was an irregularity in such work which was to his taste. His very notes would be delightful to read, partaking of the nature of pearls when prepared only for his own use. But he could not bring himself to sit at his desk and do an allotted task day after day. He accomplished what must be considered as quite a sufficient life's work. He had about twenty-five years for the purpose, and that which he has left is an ample produce for the time.

Nevertheless he was a man of fits and starts, who, not having been in his early years drilled to method, never achieved it in his career.

He died on the day before Christmas Day, as has been said above, very suddenly, in his bed, early in the morning, in the fifty-third year of his life. To those who saw him about in the world there seemed to be no reason why he should not continue his career for the next twenty years. But those who knew him were so well aware of his constant suffering, that, though they expected no sudden catastrophe, they were hardly surprised when it came. His death was probably caused by those spasms of which he had complained ten years before, in his letter to Mr. Reed. On the last day but one of the year, a crowd of sorrowing friends stood over his grave as he was laid to rest in Kensal Greene; and as quickly afterwards as it could be executed, a bust to his memory was put up in Westminster Abbey. It is a fine work of art, by Marochetti; but as a likeness is, I think, less effective than that which was modelled, and then given to the Garrick Club, by Durham, and has lately been put into marble, and now stands in the upper vestibule of the club. Neither of them, in my opinion, gives so accurate an idea of the man as a statuette in bronze, by Boehm, of which two or three copies were made. One of them is in my possession. It has been alleged, in reference to this, that there is something of a caricature in the lengthiness of the figure, in the two hands thrust into the trousers pockets, and in the protrusion of the chin. But this feeling has originated in the general idea that any face or any figure, not made by an artist more beautiful or more graceful than the original is an injustice. The face must be smoother, the pose of the body must be more dignified, the proportions more perfect, than in the person represented, or satisfaction is not felt. Mr. Boehm has certainly not flattered, but as far as my eye can judge, he has given the figure of the man exactly as he used to stand before us. I have a portrait of him in crayon, by Samuel Lawrence, as like, but hardly as natural.

A little before his death Thackeray told me that he had then succeeded in replacing the fortune which he had lost as a young man. He had, in fact, done better, for he left an income of seven hundred and fifty pounds behind him.

It has been said of Thackeray that he was a cynic. This has been said so generally, that the charge against him has become proverbial. This, stated barely, leaves one of two impressions on the mind, or perhaps the two together—that this cynicism was natural to his character and came out in his life, or that it is the characteristic of his writings. Of the nature of his writings generally, I will speak in the last chapter of this little book. As to his personal character as a cynic, I must find room to quote the following first stanzas of the little poem which appeared to his memory in *Punch*, from the pen of Shirley Brooks

He was a cynic ! By his life all wrought  
 Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle way ;  
 His heart wide open to all kindly thought,  
 His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise !

He was a cynic ! You might read it writ  
 In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair ;  
 In those blue eyes, with childlike candour lit,  
 In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear !

He was a cynic ! By the love that clung  
 About him from his children, friends, and kin ;  
 By the sharp pain, light pen and gossip tongue  
 Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within !

The spirit and nature of the man have been caught here with absolute truth. A public man should of course be judged from his public work. If he wrote as a cynic—a point which I will not discuss here—it may be fair that he who is to be known as a writer should be so called. But, as a man, I protest that it would be hard to find an individual farther removed from the character. Over and outside his fancy, which was the gift which made him so remarkable—a certain feminine softness was the most remarkable trait about him. To give some immediate pleasure was the great delight of his life—a sovereign to a schoolboy, gloves to a girl, a dinner to a man, a compliment to a woman. His charity was overflowing ; his generosity excessive. I heard once a story of woe from a man who was a dear friend to both of us. The gentleman wanted a large sum of money instantly—something under two thousand pounds—had no natural friends who could provide it, but must go utterly to the wall without it. Pondering over this sad condition of things just revealed to me, I met Thackeray between the two mounted heroes at the Horse Guards, and told him the story. “Do you mean to say that I am to find two thousand pounds?” he said, angrily, with some expletives. I explained that I had not even suggested the doing of anything—only that we might discuss the matter. Then there came over his face a peculiar smile, and a wink in his eye, and he whispered his suggestion, as though half ashamed of his meanness. “I’ll go half,” he said, “if anybody will do the rest.” And he did go half, at a day or two’s notice, though the gentleman was no more than simply a friend. I am glad to be able to add that the money was quickly repaid. I could tell various stories of the same kind, only that I lack space, and that they, if simply added one to the other, would lack interest.

He was no cynic, but he was a satirist, and could now and then be a satirist in conversation, hitting very hard when he did hit. When he was in America, he met at dinner a literary gentleman of high character, middle-aged and most dignified deportment. The gentleman was one whose character and acquirements stood very high—deservedly so—but who, in society, had that air of wrapping his toga around



him which adds, or is supposed to add, many cubits to a man's height. But he had a broken nose. At dinner he talked much of the tender passion, and did so in a manner which stirred up Thackeray's feeling of the ridiculous. "What has the world come to," said Thackeray, out loud to the table, "when two broken-nosed old fogies like you and me sit talking about love to each other!" The gentleman was astounded, and could only sit wrapping his toga in silent dismay for the rest of the evening. Thackeray then, as at other similar times, had no idea of giving pain, but when he saw a foible he put his foot upon it, and tried to stamp it out.

Such is my idea of the man whom many call a cynic, but whom I regard as one of the most soft-hearted of human beings, sweet as charity itself, who went about the world dropping pearls, doing good, and never wilfully inflicting a wound.

## CHAPTER II.

### FRASER'S MAGAZINE AND PUNCH.

How Thackeray commenced his connection with *Fraser's Magazine* I am unable to say. We know how he had come to London with a view to a literary career, and that he had at one time made an attempt to earn his bread as a correspondent to a newspaper from Paris. It is probable that he became acquainted with the redoubtable Oliver Yorke, otherwise Dr. Maginn, or some of his staff, through the connection which he had thus opened with the press. He was not known, or at any rate he was unrecognised, by *Fraser* in January, 1835, in which month an amusing catalogue was given of the writers then employed, with portraits of them all seated at a symposium. I can trace no article to his pen before November, 1837, when the *Yellowplush Correspondence* was commenced, though it is hardly probable that he should have commenced with a work of so much pretension. There had been published a volume called *My Book, or the Anatomy of Conduct*, by John Skelton, and a very absurd book no doubt it was. We may presume that it contained maxims on etiquette, and that it was intended to convey in print those invaluable lessons on deportment which, as Dickens has told us, were subsequently given by Mr. Turveydrop, in the academy kept by him for that purpose. Thackeray took this as his foundation for the *Fashionable Flax and Polite Annygoats*, by Jeames Yellowplush, with which he commenced those repeated attacks against snobbism which he delighted to make through a considerable portion of his literary life. Oliver Yorke has himself added four or five pages of his own

to Thackeray's lucubrations; and with the second, and some future numbers, there appeared illustrations by Thackeray himself, illustrations at this time not having been common with the magazine. From all this I gather that the author was already held in estimation by *Fraser's* confraternity. I remember well my own delight with *Yellowplush* at the time, and how I inquired who was the author. It was then that I first heard Thackeray's name.

The *Yellowplush Papers* were continued through nine numbers. No further reference was made to Mr. Skelton and his book beyond that given at the beginning of the first number, and the satire is only shown by the attempt made by Yellowplush, the footman, to give his ideas generally on the manners of noble life. The idea seems to be that a gentleman may, in heart and in action, be as vulgar as a footman. No doubt he may, but the chances are very much that he won't. But the virtue of the memoir does not consist in the lessons, but in the general drollery of the letters. The "orthogwaphy is inaccuwate," as a certain person says in the memoirs—"so inaccuwate" as to take a positive study to "compwehend" it; but the joke, though old, is so handled as to be very amusing. Thackeray soon rushes away from his criticisms on snobbism to other matters. There are the details of a card-sharpping enterprise, in which we cannot but feel that we recognise something of the author's own experiences in the misfortunes of Mr. Dawkins; there is the Earl of Crab's, and then the first of those attacks which he was tempted to make on the absurdities of his brethren of letters, and the only one which now has the appearance of having been ill-natured. His first victims were Dr. Dionysius Lardner and Mr. Edward Bulwer Lytton, as he was then. We can surrender the doctor to the whip of the satirist; and for "Sawedwadgeorgeearlittbulwig," as the novelist is made to call himself, we can well believe that he must himself have enjoyed the *Yellowplush Memoirs* if he ever re-read them in after-life. The speech in which he is made to dissuade the footman from joining the world of letters is so good that I will venture to insert it: "Bullwig was violently affected; a tear stood in his glistening i. 'Yellowplush,' says he, seizing my hand, 'you *are* right. Quit not your present occupation; black boots, clean knives, wear plush all your life, but don't turn literary man. Look at me. I am the first novelist in Europe. I have ranged with eagle wings over the wide regions of literature, and perched on every eminence in its turn. I have gazed with eagle eyes on the sun of philosophy, and rathomed the mysterious depths of the human mind. All languages are familiar to me, all thoughts are known to me, all men understood by me. I have gathered wisdom from the honeyed lips of Plato, as we wandered in the gardens of the Academies; wisdom, too, from the mouth of Job Johnson, as we smoked our backy in Seven Dials. Such must be the studies, and such is the mission, in

this world of the Poet-Philosopher. But the knowledge is only emptiness ; the initiation is but misery ; the initiated a man shunned and banned by his fellows. Oh ! ' said Bullwig, clasping his hands, and throwing his fine i's up to the chandelier, ' the curse of Pwomethus descends upon his wace. Wath and punishment pursue them from geneawation to geneawation ! Wo to genius, the heaven-scaler, the fire-stealer ! Wo the thrice-bitter desolation ! Earth is the wock on which Zeus, wemorseless, stwetches his withing wictim ;—men, the vultures that feed and fatten on him. Ai, ai ! it is agony eternal—gwaning and solitawy despair ! And you, Yellowplush, would penetwate these mystewies ; you would waise the awful veil, and stand in the twemendous Pwesence. Beware, as you value your peace, beware ! Withdwaw, wash Neophite ! For heaven's sake ! O for heaven's sake ! '—Here he looked round with agony ;—' give me a glass of bwandy-and-water, for this clawet is beginning to disagwee with me.' " It was thus that Thackeray began that vein of satire on his contemporaries of which it may be said that the older he grew the more amusing it was, and at the same time less likely to hurt the feelings of the author satirised.

The next tale of any length from Thackeray's pen, in the magazine, was that called *Catherine*, which is the story taken from the life of a wretched woman called Catherine Hayes. It is certainly not pleasant reading, and was not written with a pleasant purpose. It assumes to have come from the pen of Ikey Solomon, of Horsemonger Lane, and its object is to show how disgusting would be the records of thieves, cheats, and murderers, if their doings and language were described according to their nature, instead of being handled in such a way as to create sympathy, and therefore imitation. Bulwer's *Eugene Aram*, Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, and Dickens's *Nancy* were in his mind, and it was thus that he preached his sermon against the selection of such heroes and heroines by the novelists of the day. " Be it granted," he says, in his epilogue, " Solomon is dull ; but don't attack his morality. He humbly submits that, in his poem, no man shall mistake virtue for vice, no man shall allow a single sentiment of pity or admiration to enter his bosom for any character in the poem, it being from beginning to end a scene of unmixed rascality, performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling." The intention is intelligible enough, but such a story neither could have been written nor read—certainly not written by Thackeray, nor read by the ordinary reader of a first-class magazine—had he not been enabled to adorn it by infinite wit. Captain Brock, though a brave man, is certainly not described as an interesting or gallant soldier ; but he is possessed of great resources. Captain Macshane, too, is a thorough blackguard ; but he is one with a dash of loyalty about him, so that the reader can almost sympathise with him, and is tempted to say that Ikey Solomon has not quite kept his promise.



*Catherine* appeared in 1839 and 1840. In the latter of those years *The Shabby Genteel* story also came out. Then, in 1841, there followed *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, illustrated by Samuel's cousin, Michael Angelo. But though so announced in *Fraser*, there were no illustrations, and those attached to the story in later editions are not taken from sketches by Thackeray. This, as far as I know, was the first use of the name Titmarsh, and seems to indicate some intention on the part of the author of creating a hoax as to two personages—one the writer and the other the illustrator. If it were so, he must soon have dropped the idea. In the last paragraph he has shaken off his cousin Michael. The main object of the story is to expose the villany of bubble companies, and the danger they run who venture to have dealings with city matters which they do not understand. I cannot but think that he altered his mind and changed his purpose while he was writing it, actuated probably by that editorial monition as to its length.

In 1842 were commenced *The Confessions of George Fitz-Boodle*, which were continued into 1843. I do not think that they attracted much attention, or that they have become peculiarly popular since. They are supposed to contain the reminiscences of a younger son, who moans over his poverty, complains of womankind generally, laughs at the world all round, and intersperses his pages with one or two excellent ballads. I quote one, written for the sake of affording a parody, with the parody along with it, because the two together give so strong an example of the condition of Thackeray's mind in regard to literary products. The "humbug" of everything, the pretence, the falseness of affected sentiment, the remoteness of poetical pathos from the true condition of the average minds of men and women, struck him so strongly, that he sometimes allowed himself almost to feel—or at any rate, to say—that poetical expression, as being above nature, must be unnatural. He had declared to himself that all humbug was odious, and should be by him laughed down to the extent of his capacity. His Yellowplush, his Catherine Hayes, his Fitz-Boodle, his Barry Lyndon, and Becky Sharp, with many others of this kind, were all invented and treated for this purpose and after this fashion. I shall have to say more on the same subject when I come to *The Snob Papers*. In this instance he wrote a very pretty ballad, *The Willow Tree*—so good that if left by itself it would create no idea of absurdity or extravagant pathos in the mind of the ordinary reader—simply that he might render his own work absurd by his own parody.

#### THE WILLOW-TREE.

##### No. I.

Know ye the willow-tree,  
Whose gray leaves quiver,  
Whispering gloomily  
To yon pale river?

#### THE WILLOW-TREE.

##### No. II.

Long by the willow-tree  
Vainly they sought her,  
Wild rang the mother's screams  
O'er the gray water.

Lady, at eventide  
Wander not near it !  
They say its branches hide  
A sad lost spirit !

Once to the willow-tree  
A maid came fearful,  
Pale seemed her cheek to be,  
Her blue eye tearful.  
Soon as she saw the tree,  
Her steps moved fleetly.  
No one was there—ah me !—  
No one to meet her !

Quick beat her heart to hear  
The far bells' chime  
Toll from the chapel-tower  
The trysting-time.  
But the red sun went down  
In golden flame,  
And though she looked around,  
Yet no one came !

Presently came the night,  
Sadly to greet her—  
Moon in her silver light,  
Stars in their glitter,  
Then sank the moon away  
Under the billow.  
Still wept the maid alone—  
There by the willow !

Through the long darkness,  
By the stream rolling,  
Hour after hour went on  
Tolling and tolling.  
Long was the darkness,  
Lonely and stilly.  
Shrill came the night wind,  
Piercing and chilly.

Shrill blew the morning breeze,  
Biting and cold.  
Bleak peers the gray dawn  
Over the wold !  
Bleak over moor and stream  
Looks the gray dawn,  
Gray with dishevelled hair.  
Still stands the willow there—  
The maid is gone !

Domine, Domine !  
Sing we a litany—  
Sing for poor maiden-hearts  
broken and weary ;

"Where is my lovely one ?  
Where is my daughter ?

"Rouse thee, sir constable—  
Rouse thee and look.  
Fisherman, bring your net,  
Boatman, your hook.  
Beat in the lily-beds,  
Dive in the brook."

Vainly the constable  
Shouted and called her.  
Vainly the fisherman  
Beat the green alder.  
Vainly he threw the net,  
Never it hauled her !

Mother beside the fire  
Sat, her night-cap in ;  
Father in easy-char,  
Gloomily napping ;  
When at the window-sill  
Came a light tapping.

And a pale countenance  
Looked through the casement.  
Loud beat the mother's heart,  
Sick with amazement,  
And at the vision which  
Came to surprise her !  
Shrieking in an agony—  
"Lor' ! it's Elizar !"

Yes, 'twas Elizabeth :—  
Yes, 'twas their girl ;  
Pale was her cheek, and her  
Hair out of curl.  
"Mother !" the loved one,  
Blushing, exclaimed,  
"Let not your innocent  
Lizzy be blamed."

"Yesterday, going to Aunt  
Jones's to tea,  
Mother, dear mother, I  
Forgot the door-key !  
And as the night was cold,  
And the way steep,  
Mrs. Jones kept me to  
Breakfast and sleep."

Whether her pa and ma  
Fully believed her,  
That we shall never know.  
Stern they received her ;

Sing we a litany,  
Wail we and weep we a  
wild miserere !

And for the work of that  
Cruel, though short night—  
Sent her to bed without  
Tea for a forinight.

#### MORAL.

Hey diddle diddlety,  
Cat and the fiddlety,  
Maidens of England take  
caution by she !  
Let love and suicide  
Never tempt you aside.  
And always remember to take  
the door-key !

Mr. George Fitz-Boodle gave his name to other narratives beyond his own *Confessions*. A series of stories was carried on by him in *Fraser*, called *Men's Wives*, containing three : *Ravenwing, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry*, and *Dennis Hoggarty's Wife*. The first chapter in *Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry* describes "The Fight at Slaughter House." Slaughter House, as Mr. Venables reminded us in the last chapter, was near Smithfield, in London—the school which afterwards became Grey Friars ; and the fight between Biggs and Berry is the record of one which took place in the flesh when Thackeray was at the Charter House. But Mr. Fitz-Boodle's name was afterwards attached to a greater work than these, to a work so great that subsequent editors have thought him to be unworthy of the honour. In the January number, 1844, of *Fraser's Magazine*, are commenced the *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon*, and the authorship is attributed to Mr. Fitz-Boodle. The title given in the magazine was *The Luck of Barry Lyndon : a Romance of the last Century*. By Fitz-Boodle. In the collected edition of Thackeray's works the *Memoirs* are given as "written by himself," and were, I presume, so brought out by Thackeray, after they had appeared in *Fraser*. Why Mr. George Fitz-Boodle should have been robbed of so great an honour I do not know.

In imagination, language, construction, and general literary capacity, Thackeray never did anything more remarkable than *Barry Lyndon*. I have quoted the words which he put into the mouth of Ikey Solomon, declaring that in the story which he has there told he has created nothing but disgust for the wicked characters he has produced, and that he has "used his humble endeavours to cause the public also to hate them." Here, in *Barry Lyndon*, he has, probably unconsciously, acted in direct opposition to his own principles. Barry Lyndon is as great a scoundrel as the mind of man ever conceived. He is one who might have taken as his motto Satan's words : "Evil, be thou my good." And yet his story is so written that it is almost impossible not to entertain something of a friendly feeling for him. He tells his own adventures as a card-sharper, bully, and liar ; as a



heartless wretch, who had neither love nor gratitude in his composition ; who had no sense even of loyalty ; who regarded gambling as the highest occupation to which a man could devote himself, and fraud as always justified by success ; a man possessed by all meanesses except cowardice. And the reader is so carried away by his frankness and energy as almost to rejoice when he succeeds, and to grieve with him when he is brought to the ground.

The man is perfectly satisfied as to the reasonableness—I might almost say, as to the rectitude—of his own conduct throughout. He is one of a decayed Irish family, that could boast of good blood. His father had obtained possession of the remnants of the property by turning Protestant, thus ousting the elder brother, who later on becomes his nephew's confederate in gambling. The elder brother is true to the old religion, and as the law stood in the last century, the younger brother, by changing his religion, was able to turn him out. Barry, when a boy, learns the slang and the gait of the debauched gentlemen of the day. He is specially proud of being a gentleman by birth and manners. He had been kidnapped, and made to serve as a common soldier, but boasts that he was at once fit for the occasion when enabled to show as a court gentleman. "I came to it at once," he says, "and as if I had never done anything else all my life. I had a gentleman to wait upon me, a French *friseur* to dress my hair of a morning. I knew the taste of chocolate as by intuition almost, and could distinguish between the right Spanish and the French before I had been a week in my new position. I had rings on all my fingers and watches in both my fobs—canes, trinkets, and snuffboxes of all sorts. I had the finest natural taste for lace and china of any man I ever knew."

To dress well, to wear a sword with a grace, to carry away his plunder with affected indifference, and to appear to be equally easy when he loses his last ducat, to be agreeable to women, and to look like a gentleman—these are his accomplishments. In one place he rises to the height of a grand professor in the art of gambling, and gives his lessons with almost a noble air. "Play grandly, honourably. Be not, of course, cast down at losing ; but above all, be not eager at winning, as mean souls are." And he boasts of his accomplishments with so much eloquence as to make the reader sure that he believes in them. He is quite pathetic over himself, and can describe with heartrending words the evils that befall him when others use against him successfully any of the arts which he practises himself.

The marvel of the book is not so much that the hero should evidently think well of himself, as that the author should so tell his story as to appear to be altogether on the hero's side. In *Catherine*, the horrors described are most truly disgusting—so much that the story, though very clever, is not pleasant reading. The *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* are very pleasant to read. There is nothing to shock

or disgust. The style of narrative is exactly that which might be used as to the exploits of a man whom the author intended to represent as deserving of sympathy and praise—so that the reader is almost brought to sympathise. But I should be doing an injustice to Thackeray if I were to leave an impression that he had taught lessons tending to evil practice, such as he supposed to have been left by *Jack Sheppard* or *Eugene Aram*. No one will be tempted to undertake the life of a *chevalier d'industrie* by reading the book, or be made to think that cheating at cards is either an agreeable or a profitable profession. The following is excellent as a tirade in favour of gambling, coming from Redmond de Balibari, as he came to be called during his adventures abroad, but it will hardly persuade anyone to be a gambler :

“ We always played on parole with anybody—any person, that is, of honour and noble lineage. We never pressed for our winnings, or declined to receive promissory notes in lieu of gold. But woe to the man who did not pay when the note became due ! Redmond de Balibari was sure to wait upon him with his bill, and I promise you there were very few bad debts. On the contrary, gentlemen were grateful to us for our forbearance, and our character for honour stood unimpeached. In latter times, a vulgar national prejudice has chosen to cast a slur upon the character of men of honour engaged in the profession of play ; but I speak of the good old days of Europe, before the cowardice of the French aristocracy (in the shameful revolution, which served them right) brought discredit upon our order. They cry fie now upon men engaged in play ; but I should like to know how much more honourable *their* modes of livelihood are than ours. The broker of the Exchange, who bulls and bears, and buys and sells, and dabbles with lying loans, and trades upon state-secrets—what is he but a gamester ? The merchant who deals in teas and tallow, is he any better ? His bales of dirty indigo are his dice, his cards come up every year instead of every ten minutes, and the sea is his green-table. You call the profession of the law an honourable one, where a man will lie for any bidder—lie down poverty for the sake of a fee from wealth ; lie down right because wrong is in his brief. You call a doctor an honourable man—a swindling quack who does not believe in the nostrums which he prescribes, and takes your guinea for whispering in your ear that it is a fine morning. And yet, forsooth, a gallant man, who sits him down before the baize and challenges all comers, his money against theirs, his fortune against theirs, is proscribed by your modern moral world ! It is a conspiracy of the middle-class against gentlemen. It is only the shopkeeper cant which is to go down nowadays. I say that play was an institution of chivalry. It has been wrecked along with other privileges of men of birth. When Seingalt engaged a man for six-and-thirty hours without leaving the table, do you think he showed no courage ? How have we had

the best blood, and the brightest eyes too, of Europe throbbing round the table, as I and my uncle have held the cards and the bank against some terrible player, who was matching some thousands out of his millions against our all, which was there on the baize! When we engaged that daring Alexis Kossloffsky, and won seven thousand louis on a single coup, had we lost we should have been beggars the next day; when *he* lost, he was only a village and a few hundred serfs in pawn the worse. When at Toeplitz the Duke of Courland brought fourteen lacqueys, each with four bags of florins, and challenged our bank to play against the sealed bags, what did we ask? 'Sir,' said we, 'we have but eighty thousand florins in bank, or two hundred thousand at three months. If your highness's bags do not contain more than eighty thousand we will meet you.' And we did; and after eleven hours' play, in which our bank was at one time reduced to two hundred and three ducats, we won seventeen thousand florins of him. Is *this* not something like boldness? Does this profession not require skill, and perseverance, and bravery? Four crowned heads looked on at the game, and an imperial princess, when I turned up the ace of hearts and made Paroli, burst into tears. No man on the European Continent held a higher position than Redmond Barry then; and when the Duke of Courland lost, he was pleased to say that we had won nobly. And so we had, and spent nobly what we won." This is very grand, and is put as an eloquent man would put it who really wished to defend gambling.

The rascal, of course, comes to a miserable end, but the tone of the narrative is continued throughout. He is brought to live at last with his old mother in the Fleet prison, on a wretched annuity of fifty pounds per annum, which she has saved out of the general wreck, and there he dies of delirium tremens. For an assumed tone of continued irony, maintained through the long memoir of a life, never becoming tedious, never unnatural, astounding us rather by its naturalness, I know nothing equal to *Barry Lyndon*.

As one reads, one sometimes is struck by a conviction that this or the other writer has thoroughly liked the work on which he is engaged. There is a gusto about his passages, a liveliness in the language, a spring in the motion of the words, an eagerness of description, a lilt, if I may so call it, in the progress of the narrative, which makes the reader feel that the author has himself greatly enjoyed what he has written. He has evidently gone on with his work without any sense of weariness or doubt; and the words have come readily to him. So it has been with *Barry Lyndon*. "My mind was filled full with those blackguards," Thackeray once said to a friend. It is easy enough to see that it was so. In the passage which I have above quoted, his mind was running over with the idea that a rascal might be so far gone in rascality as to be in love with his own trade.

This was the last of Thackeray's long stories in *Fraser*. I have



given by no means a complete catalogue of his contributions to the magazine, but I have perhaps mentioned those which are best known. There were many short pieces which have now been collected in his works, such as *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches*, and the *Carmen Lillense*, in which the poet is supposed to be detained at Lille by want of money. There are others which I think are not to be found in the collected works, such as a *Box of Novels by Titmarsh* and *Titmarsh in the Picture Galleries*. After the name of Titmarsh had been once assumed it was generally used in the papers which he sent to *Fraser*.

Thackeray's connection with *Punch* began in 1843, and, as far as I can learn, *Miss Tickletoby's Lectures on English History* was his first contribution. They, however, have not been found worthy of a place in the collected edition. His short pieces during a long period of his life were so numerous that to have brought them all together would have weighted his more important works with too great an amount of extraneous matter. The same lady, Miss Tickletoby, gave a series of lectures. There was *The History of the next French Revolution*, and *The Wanderings of our Fat Contributor*—the first of which is, and the latter is not, perpetuated in his works. Our old friend Jeames Yellowplush, or De la Pluche—for we cannot for a moment doubt that he is the same Jeames—is very prolific, and as excellent in his orthography, his sense, and satire, as ever. These papers began with *The Lucky Speculator*. He lives in The Albany; he hires a brougham; and is devoted to Miss Emily Flimsey, the daughter of Sir George, who had been his master—to the great injury of poor Maryanne, the fellow-servant who had loved him in his kitchen days. Then there follows that wonderful ballad, *Jeames of Backley Square*. Upon this he writes an angry letter to *Punch*, dated from his chambers in The Albany: "Has a regular subscriber to your amusing paper, I beg leave to state that I should never have done so had I supposed that it was your 'abbot to igspose the mistaries of privit life, and to hinger the delligit feelings of umble individyous like myself." He writes in his own defence, both as to Maryanne and to the share-dealing by which he had made his fortune; and he ends with declaring his right to the position which he holds. "You are corriect in stating that I am of hancient Normin fam'ly. This is more than Peal can say, to whomb I applied for a barnetcy; but the primier being of low igstraction, natrally stikles for his horder." And the letter is signed "Fitzjames De la Pluche." Then follows his diary, beginning with a description of the way he rushed into *Punch's* office, declaring his misfortunes, when losses had come upon him. "I wish to be paid for my contribewtions to your paper. Suckmstances is altered with me." Whereupon he gets a cheque upon Messrs. Pump and Aldgate, and has himself carried away to new speculations. He leaves his diary behind him, and *Punch* surrep-

titiously publishes it. There is much in the diary which comes from Thackeray's very heart. Who does not remember his indignation against Lord Bareacres? "I gave the old humbug a few shares out of my own pocket. 'There, old Pride,' says I, 'I like to see you down on your knees to a footman. There, old Pomposity! Take fifty pounds. I like to see you come cringing and begging for it.' Whenever I see him in a very public place, I take my change for my money. I digg him in the ribs, or clap his padded old shoulders. I call him 'Bareacres, my old brick,' and I see him wince. It does my 'art good." It does Thackeray's heart good to pour himself out in indignation against some imaginary Bareacres. He blows off his steam with such eagerness that he forgets for a time, or nearly forgets, his cacography. Then there are "Jeames on Time Bargings," "Jeames on the Gauge Question," "Mr. Jeames again." Of all our author's heroes Jeames is perhaps the most amusing. There is not much in that joke of bad spelling, and we should have been inclined to say beforehand, that Mrs. Malaprop had done it so well and so sufficiently, that no repetition of it would be received with great favour. Like other dishes, it depends upon the cooking. Jeames, with his "suckmstances," high or low, will be immortal.

There were *The Travels in London*, a long series of them; and then *Punch's Prize Novelists*, in which Thackeray imitates the language and plots of Bulwer, Disraeli, Charles Lever, G. P. R. James, Mrs. Gore, and Cooper, the American. They are all excellent; perhaps Codlingsby is the best. Mendoza, when he is fighting with the bargeman, or drinking with Codlingsby, or receiving Louis Philippe in his rooms, seems to have come direct from the pen of our Premier. Phil Fogerty's jump, and the younger and the elder horsemen, as they come riding into the story, one in his armour and the other with his feathers, have the very savour and tone of Lever and James; but then the savour and the tone are not so piquant. I know nothing in the way of imitation to equal Codlingsby, if it be not the tale of Drury Lane, by W. S. in the *Rejected Addresses*, of which it is said that Walter Scott declared that he must have written it himself. The scene between Dr. Franklin, Louis XVI., Marie Antoinette, and Tattua, the chief of the Nose-rings, as told in *The Stars and Stripes*, is perfect in its way, but it fails as being a caricature of Cooper. The caricaturist has been carried away beyond and above his model, by his own sense of fun.

Of the ballads which appeared in *Punch* I will speak elsewhere, as I must give a separate short chapter to our author's power of versification; but I must say a word of *The Snob Papers*, which were at the time the most popular and the best known of all Thackeray's contributions to *Punch*. I think that perhaps they were more charming, more piquant, more apparently true, when they came out one after another in the periodical, than they are now as collected together. I

think that one at a time would be better than many. And I think that the first half in the long list of snobs would have been more manifestly snobs to us than they are now with the second half of the list appended. In fact, there are too many of them, till the reader is driven to tell himself that the meaning of it all is that Adam's family is from first to last a family of snobs. "First," says Thackeray, in preface, "the world was made; then, as a matter of course, snobs; they existed for years and years, and were no more known than America. But presently—*ingens patebat tellus*—the people became darkly aware that there was such a race. Not above five-and-twenty years since, a name, an expressive monosyllable, arose to designate that case. That name has spread over England like railroads subsequently; snobs are known and recognised throughout an empire on which I am given to understand the sun never sets. *Punch* appears at the right season to chronicle their history; and the individual comes forth to write that history in *Punch*.

"I have—and for this gift I congratulate myself with a deep and abiding thankfulness—an eye for a snob. If the truthful is the beautiful, it is beautiful to study even the snobbish—to track snobs through history as certain little dogs in Hampshire hunt out truffles; to sink shafts in society, and come upon rich veins of snob-ore. Snobbishness is like Death, in a quotation from Horace, which I hope you never heard, 'beating with equal foot at poor men's doors, and kicking at the gates of emperors.' It is a great mistake to judge of snobs lightly, and think they exist among the lower classes merely. An immense percentage of snobs, I believe, is to be found in every rank of this mortal life. You must not judge hastily or vulgarly of snobs; to do so shows that you are yourself a snob. I myself have been taken for one."

The state of Thackeray's mind when he commenced his delineations of snobbery is here accurately depicted. Written, as these papers were, for *Punch*, and written, as they were, by Thackeray, it was a necessity that every idea put forth should be given as a joke, and that the satire on society in general should be wrapped up in burlesque absurdity. But not the less eager and serious was his intention. When he tells us, at the end of the first chapter, of a certain Colonel Snobley, whom he met at "Bagnigge Wells," as he says, and with whom he was so disgusted that he determined to drive the man out of the house, we are well aware that he had met an offensive military gentleman—probably at Tunbridge. Gentlemen thus offensive, even though tamely offensive, were peculiarly offensive to him. We presume, by what follows, that this gentleman, ignorantly—for himself most unfortunately—spoke of Publicola. Thackeray was disgusted—disgusted that such a name should be lugged into ordinary conversation at all, and then that a man should talk about a name with which he was so little acquainted as not to know how to pronounce it. The



man was therefore a snob, and ought to be put down ; in all which I think that Thackeray was unnecessarily hard on the man, and gave him too much importance.

So it was with him in his whole intercourse with snobs—as he calls them. He saw something that was distasteful, and a man instantly became a snob in his estimation. “ But you *can* draw,” a man once said to him, there having been some discussion on the subject of Thackeray’s art powers. The man meant no doubt to be civil, but meant also to imply that for the purpose needed the drawing was good enough—a matter on which he was competent to form an opinion. Thackeray instantly put the man down as a snob for flattering him. The little courtesies of the world and the little discourtesies became snobbish to him. A man could not wear his hat, or carry his umbrella, or mount his horse, without falling into some error of snobbism before his hypercritical eyes. St. Michael would have carried his armour amiss, and St. Cecilia have been snobbish as she twanged her harp.

I fancy that a policeman considers that every man in the street would be properly “ run in,” if only all the truth about the man had been known. The tinker thinks that every pot is unsound. The cobbler doubts the stability of every shoe. So at last it grew to be the case with Thackeray. There was more hope that the city should be saved because of its ten just men, than for society, if society were to depend on ten who were not snobs. All this arose from the keenness of his vision into that which was really mean. But that keenness became so aggravated by the intenseness of his search that the slightest speck of dust became to his eyes as a foul stain. Publicola, as we saw, damned one poor man to a wretched immortality, and another was called pitilessly over the coals because he had mixed a grain of flattery with a bushel of truth. Thackeray tells us that he was born to hunt out snobs, as certain dogs are trained to find truffles. But we can imagine that a dog, very energetic at producing truffles, and not finding them as plentiful as his heart desired, might occasionally produce roots which were not genuine—might be carried on in his energies till to his senses every fungus-root became a truffle. I think that there has been something of this with our author’s snob-hunting, and that his zeal was at last greater than his discrimination.

The nature of the task which came upon him made this fault almost unavoidable. When a hit is made, say with a piece at a theatre, or with a set of illustrations, or with a series of papers on this or the other subject—when something of this kind has suited the taste of the moment, and gratified the public, there is a natural inclination on the part of those who are interested to continue that which has been found to be good. It pays and it pleases, and it seems to suit everybody. Then it is continued usque ad nauseam. We see it in everything. When the king said he liked partridges, partridges were served him

every day. The world was pleased with certain ridiculous portraits of its big men. The big men were soon used up, and the little men had to be added.

We can imagine that even *Punch* may occasionally be at a loss for subjects wherewith to delight its readers. In fact, *The Snob Papers* were too good to be brought to an end, and therefore there were forty-five of them. A dozen would have been better. As he himself says in his last paper, "for a mortal year we have been together flattering and abusing the human race." It was exactly that. Of course we know—everybody always knows—that a bad specimen of his order may be found in every division of society. There may be a snob king, a snob parson, a snob member of parliament, a snob grocer, tailor, goldsmith, and the like. But that is not what has been meant. We did not want a special satirist to tell us what we all knew before. Had snobbishness been divided for us into its various attributes and characteristics, rather than attributed to various classes, the end sought—the exposure, namely, of the evil—would have been better attained. The snobbishness of flattery, of falsehood, of cowardice, lying, time-serving, money-worship, would have been perhaps attacked to a better purpose than that of kings, priests, soldiers, merchants, or men of letters. The assault as made by Thackeray seems to have been made on the profession generally.

The paper on clerical snobs is intended to be essentially generous, and is ended by an allusion to certain old clerical friends which has a sweet tone of tenderness in it. "How should he who knows you, not respect you or your calling? May this pen never write a pennyworth again if it ever casts ridicule upon either." But in the mean time he has thrown his stone at the covetousness of bishops, because of certain Irish prelates who died rich many years before he wrote. The insinuation is that bishops generally take more of the loaves and fishes than they ought, whereas the fact is that bishops' incomes are generally so insufficient for the requirements demanded of them, that a feeling prevails that a clergyman to be fit for a bishopric should have a private income. He attacks the snobbishness of the universities, showing us how one class of young men consists of fellow-commoners, who wear lace and drink wine with their meals, and another class consists of sizars, or servitors, who wear badges, as being poor, and are never allowed to take their food with their fellow-students. That arrangements fit for past times are not fit for these is true enough. Consequently, they should gradually be changed, and from day to day are changed. But there is no snobbishness in this. Was the fellow-commoner a snob when he acted in accordance with the custom of his rank and standing? or the sizar who accepted aid in achieving that education which he could not have got without it? or the tutor of the college, who carried out the rules entrusted to him? There are two military snobs, Rag and Famish. One is a swindler, and the other a

debaunched young idiot. No doubt they are both snobs, and one has been, while the other is, an officer. But there is, I think, not an unfairness so much as an absence of intuition, in attaching to soldiers especially two vices to which all classes are open. Rag was a gambling snob, and Famish a drunken snob; but they were not specially military snobs. There is a chapter devoted to dinner-giving snobs, in which I think the doctrine laid down will not hold water, and therefore that the snobbism imputed is not proved. "Your usual style of meal," says the satirist—"that is plenteous, comfortable, and in its perfection—should be that to which you welcome your friends." Then there is something said about the "Brummagem plate pomp," and we are told that it is right that dukes should give grand dinners, but that we—of the middle class—should entertain our friends with the simplicity which is customary with us. In all this there is, I think, a mistake. The duke gives a grand dinner because he thinks his friends will like it; sitting down when alone with the duchess, we may suppose, with a retinue and grandeur less than that which is arrayed for gala occasions. So is it with Mr. Jones, who is no snob because he provides a costly dinner—if he can afford it. He does it because he thinks his friends will like it. It may be that the grand dinner is a bore—and that the leg of mutton, with plenty of gravy and potatoes all hot, would be nicer. I generally prefer the leg of mutton myself. But I do not think that snobbery is involved in the other. A man, no doubt, may be a snob in giving a dinner. I am not a snob because for the occasion I eke out my own dozen silver forks with plated ware; but if I make believe that my plated ware is true silver, then I am a snob.

In that matter of association with our betters—we will for the moment presume that gentlemen and ladies with titles or great wealth are our betters—great and delicate questions arise as to what is snobbery and what is not, in speaking of which Thackeray becomes very indignant, and explains the intensity of his feelings as thoroughly by a charming little picture as by his words. It is a picture of Queen Elizabeth as she is about to trample with disdain on the coat which that snob Raleigh is throwing for her use on the mud before her. This is intended to typify the low parasite nature of the Englishman which has been described in the previous page or two. "And of these calm moralists"—it matters not for our present purpose who were the moralists in question—"is there one, I wonder, whose heart would not throb with pleasure if he could be seen walking arm-in-arm with a couple of dukes down Pall Mall? No; it is impossible, in our condition of society, not to be sometimes a snob." And again: "How should it be otherwise in a country where lordolatry is part of our creed, and where our children are brought up to respect the 'Peerage' as the Englishman's second Bible?" Then follows the wonderfully graphic picture of Queen Elizabeth and Raleigh



In all this Thackeray has been carried away from the truth by his hatred for a certain meanness of which there are no doubt examples enough. As for Raleigh, I think we have always sympathised with the young man, instead of despising him, because he felt on the impulse of the moment that nothing was too good for the woman and the queen combined. The idea of getting something in return for his coat could hardly have come so quick to him as that impulse in favour of royalty and womanhood. If one of us to-day should see the queen passing, would he not raise his hat, and assume, unconsciously, something of an altered demeanour because of his reverence for majesty? In doing so he would have no mean desire for getting anything. The throne and its occupant are to him honourable, and he honours them. There is surely no greater mistake than to suppose that reverence is snobbishness. I meet a great man in the street, and some chance having brought me to his knowledge, he stops and says a word to me. Am I a snob because I feel myself to be graced by his notice? Surely not. And if his acquaintance goes further and he asks me to dinner, am I not entitled so far to think well of myself because I have been found worthy of his society?

They who have raised themselves in the world, and they, too, whose position has enabled them to receive all that estimation can give, all that society can furnish, all that intercourse with the great can give, are more likely to be pleasant companions than they who have been less fortunate. That picture of two companion dukes in Pall Mall is too gorgeous for human eye to endure. A man would be scorched to cinders by so much light, as he would be crushed by a sack of sovereigns even though he might be allowed to have them if he could carry them away. But there can be no doubt that a peer taken at random as a companion would be preferable to a clerk from the counting-house—taken at random. The clerk might turn out a scholar on your hands, and the peer no better than a poor spendthrift; but the chances are the other way.

A tuft-hunter is a snob, a paradise is a snob, the man who allows the manhood within him to be awed by a coronet is a snob. The man who worships mere wealth is a snob. But so also is he who, in fear lest he should be called a snob, is afraid to seek the acquaintance—or if it come to speak of the acquaintance—of those whose acquaintance is manifestly desirable. In all this I feel that Thackeray was carried beyond the truth by his intense desire to put down what is mean.

It is in truth well for us all to know what constitutes snobbism, and I think that Thackeray, had he not been driven to dilution and dilation, could have told us. If you will keep your hands from picking and stealing, and your tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering, you will not be a snob. The lesson seems to be simple, and perhaps a little trite, but if you look into it, it will be found to contain nearly all that is necessary.

But the excellence of each individual picture as it is drawn is not the less striking because there may be found some fault with the series as a whole. What can excel the telling of the story of Captain Shindy at his club—which is, I must own, as true as it is graphic? Captain Shindy is a real snob. “‘Look at it, sir; is it cooked? Smell it, sir. Is it meat fit for a gentleman?’” he roars out to the steward, who stands trembling before him, and who in vain tells him that the Bishop of Bullocksmithy has just had three from the same loin.” The telling as regards Captain Shindy is excellent, but the side-long attack upon the episcopate is cruel. “All the waiters in the club are huddled round the captain’s mutton-chop. He roars out the most horrible curses at John for not bringing the pickles. He utters the most dreadful oaths because Thomas has not arrived with the Harvey sauce. Peter comes tumbling with the water jug over Jeames, who is bringing the ‘glittering canisters with bread.’”  
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“Poor Mrs. Shindy and the children are, meanwhile, in dingy lodgings somewhere, waited upon by a charity girl in pattens.”

The visit to Castle Carabas, and the housekeeper’s description of the wonders of the family mansion, is as good. “‘The Side Entrance and ‘All,’ says the housekeeper. ‘The halligator hover the mantelpiece was brought home by Hadmiral St. Michaels, when a capting with Lord Hanson. The harms on the cheers is the harms of the Carabas family. The great ‘all is seventy feet in lenth, fifty-six in breath, and thirty-eight feet igh. The carvings of the chimlies, representing the buth of Venus and ‘Ercules and ‘Eyelash, is by Van Chislum, the most famous sculpture of his hage and country. The ceiling, by Calimanco, represents Painting, Harchitecture, and Music—the naked female figure with the barrel-organ—introducing George, first Lord Carabas, to the Temple of the Muses. The winder ornaments is by Vanderputty. The floor is Patagonian marble; and the chandelier in the centre was presented to Lionel, second marquis, by Lewy the Sixteenth, whose ‘ead was cut hoff in the French Revolution. We now henter the South Gallery,” etc., etc. All of which is very good fun, with a dash of truth in it also as to the snobbery—only in this it will be necessary to be quite sure where the snobbery lies. If my Lord Carabas has a “buth of Venus,” beautiful for all eyes to see, there is no snobbery, only good-nature, in the showing it; nor is there snobbery in going to see it, if a beautiful “buth of Venus” has charms for you. If you merely want to see the inside of a lord’s house, and the lord is puffed up with the pride of showing his, then there will be two snobs.

Of all those papers it may be said that each has that quality of a pearl about it which in the previous chapter I endeavoured to explain. In each some little point is made in excellent language, so as to charm

by its neatness, incision, and drollery. But *The Snob Papers* had better be read separately, and not taken in the lump.

Thackeray ceased to write for *Punch* in 1852, either entirely or almost so.

### CHAPTER III.

#### VANITY FAIR.

SOMETHING has been said, in the biographical chapter, of the way in which *Vanity Fair* was produced, and of the period in the author's life in which it was written. He had become famous—to a limited extent—by the exquisite nature of his contributions to periodicals; but he desired to do something larger, something greater, something, perhaps, less ephemeral. For though *Barry Lyndon* and others have not proved to be ephemeral, it was thus that he regarded them. In this spirit he went to work and wrote *Vanity Fair*.

It may be as well to speak first of the faults which were attributed to it. It was said that the good people were all fools, and that the clever people were all knaves. When the critics—the talking critics as well as the writing critics—began to discuss *Vanity Fair*, there had already grown up a feeling as to Thackeray as an author—that he was one who had taken up the business of castigating the vices of the world. Scott had dealt with the heroics, whether displayed in his *Flora MacIvors* or *Meg Merrilieses*, in his *Ivanhoes* or *Ochiltrees*. *Miss Edgeworth* had been moral; *Miss Austen* conventional; *Bulwer* had been poetical and sentimental; *Marryatt* and *Lever* had been funny and pugnacious, always with a dash of gallantry, displaying funny naval and funny military life; and *Dickens* had already become great in painting the virtues of the lower orders. But by all these some kind of virtue had been sung, though it might be only the virtue of riding a horse or fighting a duel. Even *Eugene Aram* and *Jack Sheppard*, with whom Thackeray found so much fault, were intended to be fine fellows, though they broke into houses and committed murders. The primary object of all those writers was to create an interest by exciting sympathy. To enhance our sympathy personages were introduced who were very vile indeed—as *Bucklaw*, in the guise of a lover, to heighten our feelings for *Ravenswood* and *Lucy*; as *Wild*, as a thief-taker, to make us more anxious for the saving of *Jack*; as *Ralph Nickleby*, to pile up the pity for his niece *Kate*. But each of these novelists might have appropriately begun with an *Arma virumque cano*. The song was to be of something god-like—even with a *Peter Simple*. With Thackeray it had been altogether different. Alas, alas! the meanness of human wishes;



the pooriness of human results ! That had been his tone. There can be no doubt that the heroic had appeared contemptible to him, as being untrue. The girl who had deceived her papa and mamma seemed more probable to him than she who perished under the willow-tree from sheer love—as given in the last chapter. Why sing songs that are false? Why tell of Lucy Ashtons and Kate Nicklebys, when pretty girls, let them be ever so beautiful, can be silly and sly? Why pour philosophy out of the mouth of a fashionable young gentleman like Pelham, seeing that young gentlemen of that sort rarely, or we may say never, talk after that fashion? Why make a house-breaker a gallant, charming young fellow, the truth being that house-breakers as a rule are as objectionable in their manners as they are in their morals ! Thackeray's mind had in truth worked in this way, and he had become a satirist. That had been all very well for *Fraser* and *Punch* ; but when his satire was continued through a long novel, in twenty-four parts, readers—who do in truth like the heroic better than the wicked—began to declare that this writer was no novelist, but only a cynic.

Thence the question arises what a novel should be—which I will endeavour to discuss very shortly in a later chapter. But this special fault was certainly found with *Vanity Fair* at the time. Heroines should not only be beautiful, but should be endowed also with a quasi-celestial grace—grace of dignity, propriety, and reticence. A heroine should hardly want to be married, the arrangement being almost too mundane—and, should she be brought to consent to undergo such bond, because of its acknowledged utility, it should be at some period so distant as hardly to present itself to the mind as a reality. Eating and drinking should be altogether indifferent to her, and her clothes should be picturesque rather than smart, and that from accident rather than design. Thackeray's Amelia does not at all come up to the description here given. She is proud of having a lover, constantly declaring to herself and to others that he is “the greatest and the best of men”—whereas the young gentleman is, in truth, a very little man. She is not at all indifferent as to her finery, nor, as we see incidentally, to enjoying her suppers at Vauxhall. She is anxious to be married—and as soon as possible. A hero, too, should be dignified and of a noble presence ; a man who, though he may be as poor as Nicholas Nickleby, should nevertheless be beautiful on all occasions, and never deficient in readiness, address, or self-assertion. *Vanity Fair* is specially declared by the author to be “a novel without a hero,” and therefore we have hardly a right to complain of deficiency of heroic conduct in any of the male characters. But Captain Dobbin does become the hero, and is deficient. Why was he called Dobbin, except to make him ridiculous? Why is he so shamefully ugly so shy, so awkward? Why was he the son of a grocer? Thackeray in so depicting him was determined to run counter to the recognised

taste of novel readers. And then again there was the feeling of another great fault. Let there be the virtuous in a novel and let there be the vicious, the dignified and the undignified, the sublime and the ridiculous—only let the virtuous, the dignified, and the sublime be in the ascendant. Edith Bellenden, and Lord Evandale, and Morton himself would be too stilted, were they not enlivened by Mause, and Cuddie, and Poundtext. But here, in this novel, the vicious and the absurd have been made to be of more importance than the good and the noble. Becky Sharp and Rawdon Crawley are the real heroine and hero of the story. It is with them that the reader is called upon to interest himself. It is of them he will think when he is reading the book. It is by them that he will judge the book when he has read it. There was no doubt a feeling with the public that though satire may be very well in its place, it should not be made the backbone of a work so long and so important as this. A short story such as *Catherine* or *Barry Lyndon* might be pronounced to have been called for by the iniquities of an outside world; but this seemed to the readers to have been addressed almost to themselves. Now men and women like to be painted as Titian would have painted them, or Raffaele—not as Rembrandt, or even Rubens.

Whether the ideal or the real is the best form of a novel may be questioned, but there can be no doubt that as there are novelists who cannot descend from the bright heaven of the imagination to walk with their feet upon the earth, so there are others to whom it is not given to soar among clouds. The reader must please himself, and make his selection if he cannot enjoy both. There are many who are carried into a heaven of pathos by the woes of a Master of Ravenswood, who fail altogether to be touched by the enduring constancy of a Dobbin. There are others—and I will not say but they may enjoy the keenest delight which literature can give—who cannot employ their minds on fiction unless it be conveyed in poetry. With Thackeray it was essential that the representations made by him should be, to his own thinking, life-like. A Dobbin seemed to him to be such a one as might probably be met with in the world, whereas to his thinking a Ravenswood was simply a creature of the imagination. He would have said of such, as we would say of female faces by Raffaele, that women would like to be like them, but are not like them. Men might like to be like Ravenswood, and women may dream of men so formed and constituted, but such men do not exist. Dobbins do, and therefore Thackeray chose to write of a Dobbin.

So also of the preference given to Becky Sharp and to Rawdon Crawley. Thackeray thought that more can be done by exposing the vices than extolling the virtues of mankind. No doubt he had a more thorough belief in the one than in the other. The Dobbins he did encounter—seldom; the Rawdon Crawleys very often. He saw around him so much that was mean! He was hurt so often by the

little vanities of people! It was thus that he was driven to that overthoughtfulness about snobs of which I have spoken in the last chapter. It thus became natural to him to insist on the thing which he hated with unceasing assiduity, and only to break out now and again into a rapture of love for the true nobility which was dear to him—as he did with the character of Captain Dobbin.

It must be added to all this, that, before he has done with his snob or his knave, he will generally weave in some little trait of humanity by which the sinner shall be relieved from the absolute darkness of utter iniquity. He deals with no Varneys or Deputy-Shepherds, all villany and all lies, because the snobs and knaves he had seen had never been all snob or all knave. Even Shindy probably had some feeling for the poor woman he left at home. Rawdon Crawley loved his wicked wife dearly, and there were moments even with her in which some redeeming trait half reconciles her to the reader.

Such were the faults which were found in *Vanity Fair*; but though the faults were found freely, the book was read by all. Those who are old enough can well remember the effect which it had, and the welcome which was given to the different numbers as they appeared. Though the story is vague and wandering, clearly commenced without any idea of an ending, yet there is something in the telling which makes every portion of it perfect in itself. There are absurdities in it which would not be admitted to anyone who had not a peculiar gift of making even his absurdities delightful. No school-girl who ever lived, would have thrown back her gift-book, as Rebecca did the "dixonary," out of the carriage window as she was taken away from school. But who does not love that scene with which the novel commences? How could such a girl as Amelia Osborne have got herself into such society as that in which we see her at Vauxhall? But we forgive it all because of the telling. And then there is that crowning absurdity of Sir Pitt Crawley and his establishment.

I never could understand how Thackeray in his first serious attempt could have dared to subject himself and Sir Pitt Crawley to the critics of the time. Sir Pitt is a baronet, a man of large property, and in Parliament, to whom Becky Sharp goes as a governess at the end of a delightful visit with her friend Amelia Sedley, on leaving Miss Pinkerton's school. The Sedley carriage takes her to Sir Pitt's door. "When the bell was rung a head appeared between the interstices of the dining-room shutters, and the door was opened by a man in drab breeches and gaiters, with a dirty old coat, a foul old neck-cloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling gray eyes, and a mouth perpetually on the grin.

" 'This Sir Pitt Crayley's?' says John from the box.

" 'E'es,' says the man at the door, with a nod.



“ ‘Hand down these ’ere trunks there,’ said John.

“ ‘Hand ’em down yourself,’ said the porter.”

But John on the box declines to do this, as he cannot leave his horses.

“The bald-headed man, taking his hands out of his breeches’ pockets, advanced on this summons, and throwing Miss Sharp’s trunk over his shoulder, carried it into the house.” Then Becky is shown into the house, and a dismantled dining-room is described, into which she is led by the dirty man with the trunk.

Two kitchen chairs, and a round table, and an attenuated old poker and tongs, were, however, gathered round the fireplace, as was a sauce-pan over a feeble, sputtering fire. There was a bit of cheese and bread and a tin candlestick on the table, and a little black porter in a pint pot.

“Had your dinner, I suppose?” This was said by him of the bald head. “It is not too warm for you? Like a drop of beer?”

“Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?” said Miss Sharp, majestically.

“He, he! I’m Sir Pitt Crawley. Rek’lect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! ask Tinker if I ain’t.”

The lady addressed as Mrs. Tinker at this moment made her appearance, with a pipe and a paper of tobacco, for which she had been despatched a minute before Miss Sharp’s arrival; and she handed the articles over to Sir Pitt, who had taken his seat by the fire.

“Where’s the farden?” said he. “I gave you three half-pence; where’s the change, old Tinker?”

“There,” replied Mrs. Tinker, flinging down the coin. “It’s only baronets as cares about farthings.”

Sir Pitt Crawley has always been to me a stretch of audacity which I have been unable to understand. But it has been accepted; and from this commencement of Sir Pitt Crawley have grown the wonderful characters of the Crawley family—old Miss Crawley, the worldly, wicked, pleasure-loving aunt; the Rev. Bute Crawley and his wife, who are quite as worldly; the sanctimonious elder son, who in truth is not less so; and Rawdon, who ultimately becomes Becky’s husband—who is the bad hero of the book, as Dobbin is the good hero. They are admirable; but it is quite clear that Thackeray had known nothing of what was coming about them when he caused Sir Pitt to eat his tripe with Mrs. Tinker in the London dining-room.

There is a double story running through the book, the parts of which are but lightly woven together, of which the former tells us the life and adventures of that singular young woman, Becky Sharp; and the other the troubles and ultimate success of our noble hero, Captain Dobbin. Though it be true that readers prefer, or pretend to prefer, the romantic to the common in their novels, and complain of pages which are defiled with that which is low, yet I find that the absurd, the ludicrous, and even the evil, leave more impression behind them than the grand, the beautiful, or even the good. Dominic Sampson, Dugald Dalgetty, and Bothwell are, I think, more remembered than Fergus MacIvor, than Ivanhoe himself, or Mr. Butler the minister. It certainly came to pass that, in spite of the critics, Becky

Sharp became the first attraction in *Vanity Fair*. When we speak now of *Vanity Fair*, it is always to Becky that our thoughts recur. She has made a position for herself in the world of fiction, and is one of our established personages.

I have already said how she left school, throwing the "dixonary" out of the window, like dust from her feet, and was taken to spend a few halcyon weeks with her friend Amelia Sedley, at the Sedley mansion in Russell Square. There she meets a brother Sedley home from India—the immortal Jos—at whom she began to set her hitherto untried cap. Here we become acquainted both with the Sedley and with the Osborne families, with all their domestic affections and domestic snobbery, and have to confess that the snobbery is stronger than the affection. As we desire to love Amelia Sedley, we wish that the people around her were less vulgar or less selfish—especially we wish it in regard to that handsome young fellow, George Osborne, whom she loves with her whole heart. But with Jos Sedley we are inclined to be content, though he be fat, purse-proud, awkward, a drunkard, and a coward, because we do not want anything better for Becky. Becky does not want anything better for herself, because the man has money. She has been born a pauper. She knows herself to be but ill qualified to set up as a beauty—though by dint of cleverness she does succeed in that afterwards. She has no advantages in regard to friends or family as she enters life. She must earn her bread for herself. Young as she is, she loves money, and has a great idea of the power of money. Therefore, though Jos is distasteful at all points, she instantly makes her attack. She fails, however, at any rate for the present. She never becomes his wife, but at last she succeeds in getting some of his money. But before that time comes she has many a suffering to endure, and many a triumph to enjoy.

She goes to Sir Pitt Crawley as governess for his second family, and is taken down to Queen's Crawley in the country. There her cleverness prevails, even with the baronet, of whom I have just given Thackeray's portrait. She keeps his accounts, and writes his letters, and helps him to save money; she reads with the elder sister books they ought not to have read; she flatters the sanctimonious son. In point of fact, she becomes all in all at Queen's Crawley, so that Sir Pitt himself falls in love with her—for there is reason to think that Sir Pitt may soon become again a widower. But there also came down to the baronet's house, on an occasion of general entertaining, Captain Rawdon Crawley. Of course Becky sets her cap at him, and of course succeeds. She always succeeds. Though she is only the governess, he insists upon dancing with her, to the neglect of all the young ladies of the neighbourhood. They continue to walk together by moonlight—or starlight—the great, heavy, stupid, half-tipsy dragoon, and the intriguing, covetous, altogether unprincipled young woman. And the two young people absolutely come to love

one another in their way—the heavy, stupid, fuddled dragoon, and the false, covetous, altogether unprincipled young woman.

The fat aunt Crawley is a maiden lady, very rich, and Becky quite succeeds in gaining the rich aunt by her wiles. The aunt becomes so fond of Becky down in the country, that when she has to return to her own house in town, sick from over-eating, she cannot be happy without taking Becky with her. So Becky is installed in the house in London, having been taken away abruptly from her pupils, to the great dismay of the old lady's long-established resident companion. They all fall in love with her; she makes herself so charming, she is so clever; she can even, by help of a little care in dressing, become so picturesque! As all this goes on, the reader feels what a great personage is Miss Rebecca Sharp.

Lady Crawley dies down in the country, while Becky is still staying with his sister, who will not part with her. Sir Pitt at once rushes up to town, before the funeral, looking for consolation where only he can find it. Becky brings him down word from his sister's room that the old lady is too ill to see him.

"So much the better," Sir Pitt answered; "I want to see you, Miss Sharp. I want you back at Queen's Crawley, miss," the baronet said. His eyes had such a strange look, and were fixed upon her so stedfastly that Rebecca Sharp began almost to tremble. Then she half promises, talks about the dear children, and angles with the old man. "I tell you I want you," he says; "I'm going back to the vernal, will you come back?—yes or no?"

"I daren't. I don't think—it wouldn't be right—to be alone—with you, sir," Becky said, seemingly in great agitation.

"I say again, I want you. I can't get on without you. I didn't see what it was till you went away. The house all goes wrong. It's not the same place. All my accounts has got muddled again. You must come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come?"

"Come—as what, sir?" Rebecca gasped out.

"Come as Lady Crawley, if you like. There, will that satisfy you? Come back and be my wife. You're vit for it. Birth be hanged. You're as good a lady as ever I see. You've got more brains in your little finger than any baronet's wife in the country. Will you come? Yes or no?" Rebecca is startled, but the old man goes on. "I'll make you happy; zee if I don't. You shall do what you like, spend what you like, and have it all your own way. I'll make you a settlement. I'll do everything regular. Look here," and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr.

But Rebecca, though she had been angling, angling for favour and love and power, had not expected this. For once in her life she loses her presence of mind, and exclaims: "Oh, Sir Pitt; oh, sir; I—I'm married already!" She has married Rawdon Crawley, Sir Pitt's younger son, Miss Crawley's favourite among those of her family who are looking for her money. But she keeps her secret for the present, and writes a charming letter to the Captain: "Dearest,—Something tells me that we shall conquer. You shall leave that odious regiment. Quit gaming, racing, and be a good boy, and we shall all live in Park Lane, and *ma tante* shall leave us all her money." *Ma tante's* money has been in her mind all through, but yet she loves him.



"Suppose the old lady doesn't come to," Rawdon said to his little wife as they sat together in the snug little Brompton lodgings. She had been trying the new piano all the morning. The new gloves fitted her to a nicety. The new shawl became her wonderfully. The new rings glittered on her little hands, and the new watch ticked at her waist.

"I'll make your fortune," she said; and Delilah patted Samson's cheek.

"You can do anything," he said, kissing the little hand. "By Jove you can! and we'll drive down to the Star and Garter and dine, by Jove!"

They were neither of them quite heartless at that moment, nor did Rawdon ever become quite bad. Then follow the adventures of Becky as a married woman, through all of which there is a glimmer of love for her stupid husband, while it is the real purpose of her heart to get money how she may—by her charms, by her wit, by her lies, by her readiness. She makes love to everyone—even to her sanctimonious brother-in-law, who becomes Sir Pitt in his time—and always succeeds. But in her love-making there is nothing of love. She gets hold of that well-remembered old reprobate, the Marquis of Steyne, who possesses the two valuable gifts of being very dissolute and very rich, and from him she obtains money and jewels to her heart's desire. The abominations of Lord Steyne are depicted in the strongest language of which *Vanity Fair* admits. The reader's hair stands almost on end in horror at the wickedness of the two wretches—at her desire for money, sheer money; and his for wickedness, sheer wickedness. Then her husband finds her out—poor Rawdon! who with all his faults and thick-headed stupidity, has become absolutely entranced by the wiles of his little wife. He is carried off to a sponging-house, in order that he may be out of the way, and, on escaping unexpectedly from thralldom, finds the lord in his wife's drawing-room. Whereupon he thrashes the old lord, nearly killing him; takes away the plunder which he finds on his wife's person, and hurries away to seek assistance as to further revenge;—for he is determined to shoot the marquis, or to be shot. He goes to one Captain Macmurdo, who is to act as his second, and there he pours out his heart. "You don't know how fond I was of that one," Rawdon said, half-inarticulately. "Damme, I followed her like a footman! I gave up everything I had to her. I'm a beggar because I would marry her. By Jove, sir, I've pawned my own watch to get her anything she fancied. And she—she's been making a purse for herself all the time, and grudged me a hundred pounds to get me out of quod!" His friend alleges that the wife may be innocent after all. "It may be so," Rawdon exclaimed sadly; "but this don't look very innocent!" And he showed the captain the thousand-pound note which he had found in Becky's pocket-book.

But the marquis can do better than fight; and Rawdon, in spite of his true love, can do better than follow the quarrel up to his own undoing. The marquis, on the spur of the moment, gets the lady's husband appointed governor of Coventry Island, with a salary of

three thousand pounds a year ; and poor Rawdon at last condescends to accept the appointment. He will not see his wife again, but he makes her an allowance out of his income.

In arranging all this, Thackeray is enabled to have a side blow at the British way of distributing patronage—for the favour of which he was afterwards himself a candidate. He quotes as follows from *The Royalist* newspaper: “We hear that the governorship”—of Coventry Island—“has been offered to Colonel Rawdon Crawley, C. B., a distinguished Waterloo officer. We need not only men of acknowledged bravery, but men of administrative talents to superintend the affairs of our colonies ; and we have no doubt that the gentleman selected by the Colonial Office to fill the lamented vacancy which has occurred at Coventry Island is admirably calculated for the post.” The reader, however, is aware that the officer in question cannot write a sentence or speak two words correctly.

Our heroine's adventures are carried on much further, but they cannot be given here in detail. To the end she is the same—utterly false, selfish, covetous, and successful. To have made such a woman really in love would have been a mistake. Her husband she likes best—because he is, or was, her own. But there is no man so foul, so wicked, so unattractive, but that she can fawn over him for money and jewels. There are women to whom nothing is nasty, either in person, language, scenes, actions, or principle—and Becky is one of them ; and yet she is herself attractive. A most wonderful sketch, for the perpetration of which all Thackeray's power of combined indignation and humour was necessary !

The story of Amelia and her two lovers, George Osborne and Captain, or, as he came afterwards to be, Major, and Colonel Dobbin, is less interesting, simply because goodness and eulogy are less exciting than wickedness and censure. Amelia is a true, honest-hearted, thoroughly English young woman, who loves her love because he is grand—to her eyes—and loving him, loves him with all her heart. Readers have said that she is silly, only because she is not heroic. I do not know that she is more silly than many young ladies whom we who are old have loved in our youth, or than those whom our sons are loving at the present time. Readers complain of Amelia because she is absolutely true to nature. There are no Raffaellistic touches, no added graces, no divine romance. She is feminine all over, and British—loving, true, thoroughly unselfish, yet with a taste for having things comfortable, forgiving, quite capable of jealousy, but prone to be appeased at once, at the first kiss ; quite convinced that her lover, her husband, her children, are the people in all the world to whom the greatest consideration is due. Such a one is sure to be the dupe of a Becky Sharp, should a Becky Sharp come in her way—as is the case with so many sweet Amelias whom we have known. But in a matter of love she is sound enough and sensible enough—

and she is as true as steel. I know no trait in Amelia which a man would be ashamed to find in his own daughter.

She marries her George Osborne, who, to tell the truth of him, is but a poor kind of fellow, though he is a brave soldier. He thinks much of his own person, and is selfish. Thackeray puts in a touch or two here and there by which he is made to be odious. He would rather give a present to himself than to the girl who loved him. Nevertheless, when her father is ruined he marries her, and he fights bravely at Waterloo, and is killed. "No more firing was heard at Brussels. The pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and the city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."

Then follows the long courtship of Dobbin, the true hero—he who has been the friend of George since their old school-days; who has lived with him and served him, and has also loved Amelia. But he has loved her—as one man may love another—solely with a view to the profit of his friend. He has known all along that George and Amelia have been engaged to each other as boy and girl. George would have neglected her, but Dobbin would not allow it. George would have jilted the girl who loved him, but Dobbin would not let him. He had nothing to get for himself, but loving her as he did, it was the work of his life to get for her all that she wanted.

George is shot at Waterloo, and then come fifteen years of widowhood—fifteen years during which Becky is carrying on her manoeuvres—fifteen years during which Amelia cannot bring herself to accept the devotion of the old captain, who becomes at last a colonel. But at the end she is won. "The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last. There it is, with its head on its shoulder, billing and cooing clean up to his heart, with soft, outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. This is what he has pined after. Here it is—the summit, the end, the last page of the third volume."

The reader as he closes the book has on his mind a strong conviction, the strongest possible conviction, that among men George is as weak and Dobbin as noble as any that he has met in literature; and that among women Amelia is as true and Becky as vile as any he has encountered. Of so much he will be conscious. In addition to this he will unconsciously have found that every page he has read will have been of interest to him. There has been no padding, no lousers; every bit will have had its weight with him. And he will find too at the end, if he will think of it—though readers, I fear, seldom think much of this in regard to books they have read—that the lesson taught in every page has been good. There may be details of evil painted so as to disgust—painted almost too plainly—but none painted so as to allure.



## CHAPTER IV.

## PENDENNIS AND THE NEWCOMES.

THE absence of the heroic was, in Thackeray, so palpable to Thackeray himself that in his original preface to *Pendennis*, when he began to be aware that his reputation was made, he tells his public what they may expect and what they may not, and makes his joking complaint of the readers of his time because they will not endure with patience the true picture of a natural man. "Even the gentlemen of our age," he says—adding that the story of *Pendennis* is an attempt to describe one of them, just as he is—"even those we cannot show as they are with the notorious selfishness of their time and their education. Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must shape him, and give him a certain conventional temper." Then he rebukes his audience because they will not listen to the truth. "You will not hear what moves in the real world, what passes in society, in the clubs, colleges, mess-rooms—what is the life and talk of your sons." You want the Raffaellistic touch, or that of some painter of horrors equally removed from the truth. I tell you how a man really does act—as did Fielding with *Tom Jones*—but it does not satisfy you. You will not sympathise with this young man of mine, this *Pendennis*, because he is neither angel nor imp. If it be so, let it be so. I will not paint for you angels or imps, because I do not see them. The young man of the day, whom I do see, and of whom I know the inside and the out thoroughly, him I have painted for you; and here he is, whether you like the picture or not. This is what Thackeray meant, and, having this in his mind, he produced *Pendennis*.

The object of a novel should be to instruct in morals while it amuses. I cannot think but that every novelist who has thought much of his art will have realised as much as that for himself. Whether this may best be done by the transcendental or by the common-place is the question which it more behoves the reader than the author to answer, because the author may be fairly sure that he who can do the one will not, probably cannot, do the other. If a lad be only five feet high, he does not try to enlist in the Guards. Thackeray complains that many ladies have "remonstrated and subscribers left him," because of his realistic tendency. Nevertheless he has gone on with his work, and, in *Pendennis*, has painted a young man as natural as *Tom Jones*. Had he expended himself in the attempt he could not have drawn a *Master of Ravenswood*.

It has to be admitted that *Pendennis* is not a fine fellow. He is not as weak, as selfish, as untrustworthy as that *George Osborne* whom

Amelia married in *Vanity Fair*; but nevertheless he is weak, and selfish, and untrustworthy. He is not such a one as a father would wish to see his son, or a mother to welcome as a lover for her daughter. But then, fathers are so often doomed to find their sons not all that they wish, and mothers to see their girls falling in love with young men who are not Paladins. In our individual lives we are contented to endure an admixture of evil, which we should resent if imputed to us in the general. We presume ourselves to be truth-speaking, noble in our sentiments, generous in our actions, modest and unselfish, chivalrous and devoted. But we forgive and pass over in silence a few delinquencies among ourselves. What boy at school ever is a coward—in the general? What gentleman ever tells a lie? What young lady is greedy? We take it for granted, as though they were fixed rules in life, that our boys from our public schools look us in the face and are manly; that our gentlemen tell the truth as a matter of course; and that our young ladies are refined and unselfish. Thackeray is always protesting that it is not so, and that no good is to be done by blinking the truth. He knows that we have our little home experiences. Let us have the facts out, and mend what is bad if we can. This novel of *Pendennis* is one of his loudest protests to this effect.

I will not attempt to tell the story of *Pendennis*, how his mother loved him, how he first came to be brought up together with Laura Bell, how he thrashed the other boys when he was a boy, and how he fell in love with Miss Fotheringay, née Costigan, and was determined to marry her while he was still a hobbledohoy, how he went up to Boniface, that well-known college at Oxford, and there did no good, spending money which he had not got, and learning to gamble. The English gentleman, as we know, never lies; but *Pendennis* is not quite truthful; when the college tutor, thinking that he hears the rattling of dice, makes his way into Pen's room, Pen and his two companions are found with three *Homers* before them, and Pen asks the tutor with gravity: "What was the present condition of the river Scamander, and whether it was navigable or no?" He tells his mother that during a certain vacation he must stay up and read, instead of coming home—but, nevertheless, he goes up to London to amuse himself. The reader is soon made to understand that, though Pen may be a fine gentleman, he is not trustworthy. But he repents and comes home, and kisses his mother; only, alas! he will always be kissing somebody else also.

The story of the Amorys and the Claverings, and that wonderful French cook M. Alcide Mirobolant, forms one of those delightful digressions which Thackeray scatters through his novels rather than weaves into them. They generally have but little to do with the story itself, and are brought in only as giving scope for some incident to the real hero or heroine. But in this digression Pen is very much con-

cerned indeed, for he is brought to the very verge of matrimony with that peculiarly disagreeable lady Miss Amory. He does escape at last, but only within a few pages of the end, when we are made unhappy by the lady's victory over that poor young sinner Foker, with whom we have all come to sympathise, in spite of his vulgarity and fast propensities. She would to the last fain have married Pen, in whom she believes, thinking that he would make a name for her. "Il me faut des émotions," says Blanche. Whereupon the author, as he leaves her, explains the nature of this Miss Amory's feelings. "For this young lady was not able to carry out any emotion to the full, but had a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief; each of which flared and shone very vehemently for an instant, but subsided and gave place to the next sham emotion." Thackeray, when he drew this portrait, must certainly have had some special young lady in his view. But though we are made unhappy for Foker, Foker too escapes at last, and Blanche, with her emotions, marries. That very doubtful nobleman Comte Montmorenci de Valentinois.

But all this of Miss Amory is but an episode. The purport of the story is the way in which the hero is made to enter upon the world, subject as he has been to the sweet teaching of his mother, and subject as he is made to be to the worldly lessons of his old uncle the major. Then he is ill, and nearly dies, and his mother comes up to nurse him. And there is his friend Warrington, of whose family down in Suffolk we shall have heard something when we have read *The Virginians*—one, I think, of the finest characters, as it is certainly one of the most touching, that Thackeray ever drew. Warrington, and Pen's mother, and Laura are our hero's better angels—angels so good as to make us wonder that a creature so weak should have had such angels about him; though we are driven to confess that their affection and loyalty for him are natural. There is a melancholy beneath the roughness of Warrington, and a feminine softness combined with the reticent manliness of the man, which have endeared him to readers beyond perhaps any character in the book. Major Pendennis has become immortal. Selfish, worldly, false, padded, caring altogether for things mean and poor in themselves; still the reader likes him. It is not quite all for himself. To Pen he is good—to Pen who is the head of his family, and to come after him as the Pendennis of the day. To Pen and to Pen's mother he is beneficent after his lights. In whatever he undertakes, it is so contrived that the reader shall in some degree sympathise with him. And so it is with poor old Costigan, the drunken Irish captain, Miss Fotheringay's papa. He was not a pleasant person. "We have witnessed the deshabelle of Major Pendennis," says our author; "will any one wish to be valet-de-chambre to our other hero, Costigan? It would seem that the captain, before issuing from his bedroom, scented himself with otto of whisky." Yet there is a kindliness about him which softens our



hearts, though in truth he is very careful that the kindness shall always be shown to himself.

Among those people Pen makes his way to the end of the novel, coming near to shipwreck on various occasions, and always deserving the shipwreck which he has almost encountered. Then there will arise the question whether it might not have been better that he should be altogether shipwrecked, rather than housed comfortably with such a wife as Laura, and left to that enjoyment of happiness forever after, which is the normal heaven prepared for heroes and heroines who have done their work well through three volumes. It is almost the only instance in all Thackeray's works in which this state of bliss is reached. George Osborne, who is the beautiful lover in *Vanity Fair*, is killed almost before our eyes, on the field of battle, and we feel that Nemesis has with justice taken hold of him. Poor old Dobbin does marry the widow, after fifteen years of further service, when we know him to be a middle-aged man and her a middle-aged woman. That glorious Paradise of which I have spoken requires a freshness which can hardly be attributed to the second marriage of a widow who has been fifteen years mourning for her first husband. Clive Newcome, "the first young man," if we may so call him, of the novel which I shall mention just now, is carried so far beyond his matrimonial elysium that we are allowed to see too plainly how far from true may be those promises of hymeneal happiness forever after. The cares of married life have settled down heavily upon his young head before we leave him. He not only marries, but loses his wife, and is left a melancholy widower with his son. Esmond and Beatrix certainly reach no such elysium as that of which we are speaking. But Pen, who surely deserved a Nemesis, though perhaps not one so black as that demanded by George Osborne's delinquencies, is treated as though he had been passed through the fire, and had come out—if not pure gold, still gold good enough for goldsmiths. "And what sort of a husband will this Pendennis be?" This is the question asked by the author himself at the end of the novel; feeling, no doubt, some hesitation as to the justice of what he had just done. "And what sort of a husband will this Pendennis be?" many a reader will ask, doubting the happiness of such a marriage and the future of Laura. The querists are referred to that lady herself, who, seeing his faults and wayward moods—seeing and owning that there are better men than he—loves him always with the most constant affection. The assertion could be made with perfect confidence, but is not to the purpose. That Laura's affection should be constant, no one would doubt; but more than that is wanted for happiness. How about Pendennis and his constancy?

*The Newcomes*, which I bracket in this chapter with *Pendennis*, was not written till after *Esmond*, and appeared between that novel and *The Virginians*, which was a sequel to *Esmond*. It is supposed to be

edited by Pen, whose own adventures we have just completed, and is commenced by that celebrated night passed by Colonel Newcome and his boy Clive at the Cave of Harmony, during which the colonel is at first so pleasantly received and so genially entertained, but from which he is at last banished, indignant at the iniquities of our drunken old friend Captain Costigan, with whom we had become intimate in Pen's own memoirs. The boy Clive is described as being probably about sixteen. At the end of the story he has run through the adventures of his early life, and is left a melancholy man, a widower, one who has suffered the extremity of misery from a stepmother, and who is wrapped up in the only son that is left to him—as had been the case with his father at the beginning of the novel. *The Newcomes*, therefore, like Thackeray's other tales, is rather a slice from the biographical memoirs of a family, than a romance or novel in itself.

It is full of satire from the first to the last page. Every word of it seems to have been written to show how vile and poor a place this world is; how prone men are to deceive, how prone to be deceived. There is a scene in which "his Excellency Rummun Loll, otherwise his Highness Rummun Loll," is introduced to Colonel Newcome—or rather presented—for the two men had known each other before. All London was talking of Rummun Loll, taking him for an Indian prince, but the colonel, who had served in India, knew better. Rummun Loll was no more than a merchant, who had made a precarious fortune by doubtful means. All the girls, nevertheless, are running after his Excellency. "He's known to have two wives already in India," says Barnes Newcome; "but, by gad, for a settlement, I believe some of the girls here would marry him." We have a delightful illustration of the London girls, with their bare necks and shoulders, sitting round Rummun Loll and worshipping him as he reposes on his low settee. There are a dozen of them so enchanted that the men who wish to get a sight of the Rummun are quite kept at a distance. This is satire on the women. A few pages on we come upon a clergyman who is no more real than Rummun Loll. The clergyman, Charles Honeyman, had married the colonel's sister and had lost his wife, and now the brothers-in-law meet. "'Poor, poor Emma!' exclaimed the ecclesiastic, casting his eyes towards the chandelier, and passing a white cambric pocket-handkerchief gracefully before them. No man in London understood the ring business or the pocket-handkerchief business better, or smothered his emotion more beautifully. 'In the gayest moments, in the giddiest throng of fashion, the thoughts of the past will rise; the departed will be among us still. But this is not the strain wherewith to greet the friend newly arrived on our shores. How it rejoices me to behold you in old England!'" And so the satirist goes on with Mr. Honeyman the clergyman. Mr. Honeyman the clergyman has been already mentioned, in that extract made in our first chapter from

*Lovel the Widower.* It was he who assisted another friend, "with his wheedling tongue," in inducing Thackeray to purchase that "neat little literary paper"—called then *The Museum*, but which was in truth *The National Standard*. In describing Barnes Newcome, the colonel's relative, Thackeray in the same scene attacks the sharpness of the young men of business of the present day. There were, or were to be, some transactions with Rummun Loll, and Barnes Newcome, being in doubt, asks the colonel a question or two as to the certainty of the Rummun's money, much to the colonel's disgust. "The young man of business had dropped his drawl or his languor, and was speaking quite unaffectedly, good-naturedly, and selfishly. Had you talked to him for a week you would not have made him understand the scorn and loathing with which the colonel regarded him. Here was a young fellow as keen as the oldest curmudgeon—a lad with scarce a beard to his chin, that would pursue his bond as rigidly as Shylock." "Barnes Newcome never missed a church," he goes on, "or dressing for dinner. He never kept a tradesman waiting for his money. He seldom drank too much, and never was late for business, or huddled over his toilet, however brief his sleep or severe his headache. In a word, he was as scrupulously whited as any sepulchre in the whole bills of mortality." Thackeray had lately seen some Barnes Newcome when he wrote that.

It is all satire; but there is generally a touch of pathos even through the satire. It is satire when Miss Quigley, the governess in Park Street, falls in love with the old colonel after some dim fashion of her own. "When she is walking with her little charges in the Park, faint signals of welcome appear on her wan cheeks. She knows the dear colonel amidst a thousand horsemen." The colonel had drunk a glass of wine with her after his stately fashion, and the foolish old maid thinks too much of it. Then we are told how she knits purses for him, "as she sits alone in the schoolroom—high up in that lone house, when the little ones are long since asleep—before her dismal little tea-tray, and her little desk containing her mother's letters and her mementoes of home." Miss Quigley is an ass; but we are made to sympathise entirely with the ass, because of that morsel of pathos as to her mother's letters.

Clive Newcome, our hero, who is a second Pen, but a better fellow, is himself a satire on young men—on young men who are idle and ambitious at the same time. He is a painter; but, instead of being proud of his art, is half ashamed of it—because, not being industrious, he has not, while yet young, learned to excel. He is "doing" a portrait of Mrs. Pendennis, Laura, and thus speaks of his business. "No. 666"—he is supposed to be quoting from the catalogue of the Royal Academy for the year—"No. 666. Portrait of Joseph Muggins, Esq., Newcome, George Street. No. 979. Portrait of Mrs. Muggins on her gray pony, Newcome. No. 579. Portrait of Joseph,



Muggins, Esq.'s dog Toby, Newcome. This is what I am fit for. These are the victories I have set myself on achieving. Oh, Mrs. Pendennis ! isn't it humiliating ? Why isn't there a war ? Why haven't I a genius ? There is a painter who lives hard by, and who begs me to come and look at his work. He is in the Muggins line too. He gets his canvasses with a good light upon them ; excludes the contemplation of other objects ; stands beside his picture in an attitude himself ; and thinks that he and they are masterpieces. Oh me, what drivelling wretches we are ! Fame !—except that of just the one or two—what's the use of it ?” In all of which Thackeray is speaking his own feelings about himself as well as the world at large. What's the use of it all ? Oh vanitas vanitatum ! Oh vanity and vexation of spirit ! “ So Clive Newcome,” he says afterwards, “ lay on a bed of down and tossed and tumbled there. He went to fine dinners, and sat silent over them ; rode fine horses, and black care jumped up behind the moody horseman.” As I write this I have before me a letter from Thackeray to a friend describing his own success when *Vanity Fair* was coming out, full of the same feeling. He is making money, but he spends it so fast that he never has any ; and as for the opinions expressed on his books, he cares little for what he hears. There was always present to him a feeling of black care seated behind the horseman—and would have been equally so had there been no real care present to him. A sardonic melancholy was the characteristic most common to him—which, however, was relieved by an always present capacity for instant frolic. It was these attributes combined which made him of all satirists the most humorous, and of all humourists the most satirical. It was these that produced the Osbornes, the Dobbins, the Pens, the Clives, and the Newcomes, whom, when he loved them the most, he could not save himself from describing as mean and unworthy. A somewhat heroic hero of romance—such a one, let us say, as Waverley, or Lovel in *The Antiquary*, or Morton in *Old Mortality*—was revolting to him, as lacking those foibles which human nature seemed to him to demand.

The story ends with two sad tragedies, neither of which would have been demanded by the story, had not such sadness been agreeable to the author's own idiosyncrasy. The one is the ruin of the old colonel's fortunes, he having allowed himself to be enticed into bubble speculations ; and the other is the loss of all happiness, and even comfort, to Clive the hero, by the abominations of his mother-in-law. The woman is so iniquitous, and so tremendous in her iniquities, that she rises in tragedy. Who does not know Mrs. Mack the Campaigner ? Why at the end of his long story should Thackeray have married his hero to so lackadaisical a heroine as poor little Rosey, or brought on the stage such a she-demon as Rosey's mother ? But there is the Campaigner in all her vigour, a marvel of strength of composition—one of

the most vividly drawn characters in fiction—but a woman so odious that one is induced to doubt whether she should have been depicted.

The other tragedy is altogether of a different kind, and though unnecessary to the story, and contrary to that practice of story-telling which seems to demand that calamities to those personages with whom we are to sympathise should not be brought in at the close of a work of fiction, is so beautifully told that no lover of Thackeray's work would be willing to part with it. The old colonel, as we have said, is ruined by speculation, and in his ruin is brought to accept the alms of the brotherhood of the Grey Friars. Then we are introduced to the Charter House, at which, as most of us know, there still exists a brotherhood of the kind. He dons the gown—this old colonel, who has always been comfortable in his means, and latterly apparently rich—and occupies the single room, and eats the doled bread, and among his poor brothers sits in the chapel of his order. The description is perhaps as fine as anything that Thackeray ever did. The gentleman is still the gentleman, with all the pride of gentry;—but not the less is the humble bedesman, aware that he is living upon charity, not made to grovel by any sense of shame, but knowing that, though his normal pride may be left to him, an outward demeanour of humility is befitting.

And then he dies. "At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed feebly beat time—and just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said, 'Adsum'—and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called; and, lo, he whose heart was as that of a little child had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of his Maker!"

## CHAPTER V.

### ESMOND AND THE VIRGINIANS.

THE novel with which we are now going to deal I regard as the greatest work that Thackeray did. Though I do not hesitate to compare himself with himself, I will make no comparison between him and others; I therefore abstain from assigning to *Esmond* any special niche among prose fictions in the English language, but I rank it so high as to justify me in placing him among the small number of the highest class of English novelists. Much as I think of *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair*, I cannot quite say this of them; but, as a chain is not stronger than its weakest link, so is a poet, or a dramatist, or a novelist to be placed in no lower level than that which he has attained

by his highest sustained flight. The excellence which has been reached here Thackeray achieved, without doubt, by giving a greater amount of forethought to the work he had before him than had been his wont. When we were young we used to be told, in our house at home, that "elbow-grease" was the one essential necessary to getting a tough piece of work well done. If a mahogany table was to be made to shine, it was elbow-grease that the operation needed. Forethought is the elbow-grease which a novelist—or poet—or dramatist—requires. It is not only his plot that has to be turned and returned in his mind, not his plot chiefly, but he has to make himself sure of his situations, of his characters, of his effects, so that when the time comes for hitting the nail he may know where to hit it on the head—so that he may himself understand the passion, the calmness, the virtues, the vices, the rewards and punishments which he means to explain to others—so that his proportions shall be correct, and he be saved from the absurdity of devoting two-thirds of his book to the beginning, or two-thirds to the completion of his task. It is from want of this special labour, more frequently than from intellectual deficiency, that the tellers of stories fail so often to hit their nails on the head. To think of a story is much harder work than to write it. The author can sit down with the pen in his hand for a given time, and produce a certain number of words. That is comparatively easy, and if he have a conscience in regard to his task, work will be done regularly. But to think it over as you lie in bed, or walk about, or sit cosily over your fire, to turn it all in your thoughts, and make the things fit—that requires elbow-grease of the mind. The arrangement of the words is as though you were walking simply along a road. The arrangement of your story is as though you were carrying a sack of flour while you walked. Fielding had carried his sack of flour before he wrote *Tom Jones*, and Scott his before he produced *Ivanhoe*. So had Thackeray done—a very heavy sack of flour—in creating *Esmond*. In *Vanity Fair*, in *Pendennis*, and in *The Newcomes*, there was more of that mere wandering in which no heavy burden was borne. The richness of the author's mind, the beauty of his language, his imagination and perception of character, are all there. For that which was lovely he has shown his love, and for the hateful his hatred; but, nevertheless, they are comparatively idle books. His only work, as far as I can judge them, in which there is no touch of idleness, is *Esmond*. *Barry Lyndon* is consecutive, and has the well-sustained purpose of exhibiting a finished rascal; but *Barry Lyndon* is not quite the same from beginning to end. All his full-fledged novels, except *Esmond*, contain rather strings of incidents and memoirs of individuals, than a completed story. But *Esmond* is a whole from beginning to end, with its tale well told, its purpose developed, its moral brought home—and its nail hit well on the head and driven in.



I told Thackeray once that it was not only his best work, but so much the best, that there was none second to it. "That was what I intended," he said, "but I have failed. Nobody reads it. After all, what does it matter?" he went on after a while. "If they like anything, one ought to be satisfied. After all, Esmond was a prig." Then he laughed and changed the subject, not caring to dwell on thoughts painful to him. The elbow-grease of thinking was always distateful to him, and had no doubt been so when he conceived and carried out this work.

To the ordinary labour necessary for such a novel, he added very much by his resolution to write it in a style different, not only from that which he had made his own, but from that also which belonged to the time. He had devoted himself to the reading of the literature of Queen Anne's reign, and having chosen to throw his story into that period, and to create in it personages who were to be peculiarly concerned with the period, he resolved to use as the vehicle for his story the forms of expression then prevalent. No one who has not tried it can understand how great is the difficulty of mastering a phase of one's own language, other than that which habit has made familiar. To write in another language, if the language be sufficiently known, is a much less arduous undertaking. The lad who attempts to write his essay in Ciceronian Latin struggles to achieve a style which is not indeed common to him, but is more common than any other he has become acquainted with in that tongue. But Thackeray in his work had always to remember his Swift, his Steele, and his Addison, and to forget at the same time the modes of expression which the day had adopted. Whether he asked advice on the subject, I do not know. But I feel sure that if he did he must have been counselled against it. Let my reader think what advice he would give to any writer on such a subject. Probably he asked no advice, and would have taken none. No doubt he found himself, at first imperceptibly, gliding into a phraseology which had attractions for his ear, and then probably was so charmed with the peculiarly masculine forms of sentences which thus became familiar to him, that he thought it would be almost as difficult to drop them altogether as altogether to assume the use of them. And if he could do so successfully, how great would be the assistance given to the local colouring which is needed for a novel in prose, the scene of which is thrown far back from the writer's period! Were I to write a poem about *Cœur de Lion*, I should not mar my poem by using the simple language of the day; but if I write a prose story of the time, I cannot altogether avoid some attempt at far-away quaintnesses in language. To call a purse a "gypsire," and to begin your little speeches with "Marry come up," or to finish them with "Quotha," are but poor attempts. But even they have had their effect. Scott did the best he could with his *Cœur de Lion*. When we look to it we find

that it was but little ; though in his hands it passed for much. "By my troth," said the knight, "thou hast sung well and heartily, and in high praise of thine order." We doubt whether he achieved any similarity to the language of the time ; but still, even in the little which he attempted, there was something of the picturesque. But how much more would be done if in very truth the whole language of a story could be thrown with correctness into the form of expression used at the time depicted ?

It was this that Thackeray tried in his *Esmond*, and he has done it almost without a flaw. The time in question is near enough to us, and the literature sufficiently familiar to enable us to judge. Whether folks swore by their troth in the days of King Richard I. we do not know, but when we read Swift's letters, and Addison's papers, or Defoe's novels, we do catch the veritable sounds of Queen Anne's age, and can say for ourselves whether Thackeray has caught them correctly or not. No reader can doubt that he has done so. Nor is the reader ever struck with the affectation of an assumed dialect. The words come as though they had been written naturally—though not natural to the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a *tour de force*, and successful as such a *tour de force* so seldom is. But though Thackeray was successful in adopting the tone he wished to assume, he never quite succeeded, as far as my ear can judge, in altogether dropping it again.

And yet it has to be remembered that though *Esmond* deals with the times of Queen Anne, and "copies the language" of the time, as Thackeray himself says in the dedication, the story is not supposed to have been written till the reign of George II. *Esmond* in his narrative speaks of Fielding and Hogarth, who did their best work under George II. The idea is that Henry Esmond, the hero, went out to Virginia after the events told, and there wrote the memoir in the form of an autobiography. The estate of Castlewood, in Virginia, had been given to the Esmond family by Charles II. ; and this Esmond, our hero, finding that expatriation would best suit both his domestic happiness and his political difficulties—as the reader of the book will understand might be the case—settles himself in the colony, and there writes the history of his early life. He retains the manners, and with the manners the language of his youth. He lives among his own people, a country gentleman with a broad domain, mixing but little with the world beyond, and remains an English gentleman of the time of Queen Anne. The story is continued in *The Virginians*, the name given to a record of two lads who were grandsons of Harry Esmond, whose names are Warrington. Before *The Virginians* appeared we had already become acquainted with a scion of that family, the friend of Arthur Pendennis, a younger son of Sir Miles Warrington, of Suffolk. Henry Esmond's daughter had in a previous generation married a younger son of the then baronet.

This is mentioned now to show the way in which Thackeray's mind worked afterwards upon the details and characters which he had originated in *Esmond*.

It is not my purpose to tell the story here, but rather to explain the way in which it is written, to show how it differs from other stories, and thus to explain its effect. Harry Esmond, who tells the story, is of course the hero. There are two heroines who equally command our sympathy—Lady Castlewood, the wife of Harry's kinsman, and her daughter Beatrix. Thackeray himself declared the man to be a prig, and he was not altogether wrong. Beatrix, with whom throughout the whole book he is in love, knew him well. "Shall I be frank with you, Harry," she says, when she is engaged to another suitor, "and say that if you had not been down on your knees and so humble, you might have fared better with me? A woman of my spirit, cousin, is to be won by gallantry, and not by sighs and rueful faces. All the time you are worshipping and singing hymns to me, I know very well I am no goddess." And again: "As for you, you want a woman to bring your slippers and cap, and to sit at your feet and cry, O caro, caro! O bravo! whilst you read your Shakespeares and Miltons and stuff." He was a prig, and the girl he loved knew him, and being quite of another way of thinking herself, would have nothing to say to him in the way of love. But without something of the aptitudes of a prig the character which the author intended could not have been drawn. There was to be courage—military courage—and that propensity to fighting which the tone of the age demanded in a finished gentleman. Esmond, therefore, is ready enough to use his sword. But at the same time he has to live as becomes one whose name is in some degree under a cloud; for though he be not in truth an illegitimate offshoot of the noble family which is his, and though he knows that he is not so, still he has to live as though he were. He becomes a soldier, and it was just then that our army was accustomed "to swear horribly in Flanders." But Esmond likes his books, and cannot swear or drink like other soldiers. Nevertheless he has a sort of liking for fast ways in others, knowing that such are the ways of a gallant cavalier. There is a melancholy over his life which makes him always, to himself and to others, much older than his years. He is well aware that, being as he is, it is impossible that Beatrix should love him. Now and then there is a dash of lightness about him, as though he had taught himself, in his philosophy, that even sorrow may be borne with a smile—as though there was something in him of the Stoic's doctrine, which made him feel that even disappointed love should not be seen to wound too deep. But still, when he smiles, even when he indulges in some little pleasantry, there is that garb of melancholy over him which always makes a man a prig. But he is a gentleman from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. Thackeray had let the whole power of his intellect apply itself



to a conception of the character of a gentleman. This man is brave, polished, gifted with that old-fashioned courtesy which ladies used to love, true as steel, loyal as faith himself, with a power of self-abnegation which astonishes the criticising reader when he finds such a virtue carried to such an extent without seeming to be unnatural. To draw the picture of a man, and say that he is gifted with all the virtues, is easy enough—easy enough to describe him as performing all the virtues. The difficulty is to put your man on his legs, and make him move about, carrying his virtues with a natural gait, so that the reader shall feel that he is becoming acquainted with flesh and blood, not with a wooden figure. The virtues are all there with Henry Esmond, and the flesh and blood also, so that the reader believes in them. But still there is left a flavour of the character which Thackeray himself tasted when he called his hero a prig.

The two heroines, Lady Castlewood and Beatrix, are mother and daughter, of whom the former is in love with Esmond, and the latter is loved by him. Fault has been found with the story, because of the unnatural rivalry—because it has been felt that a mother's solicitude for her daughter should admit of no such juxtaposition. But the criticism has come, I think, from those who have failed to understand, not from those who have understood the tale; not because they have read it, but because they have not read it, and have only looked at it or heard of it. Lady Castlewood is perhaps ten years older than the boy Esmond, whom she first finds in her husband's house, and takes as a *protégé*; and from the moment in which she finds that he is in love with her own daughter, she does her best to bring about a marriage between them. Her husband is alive, and though he is a drunken brute—after the manner of lords of that time—she is thoroughly loyal to him. The little touches, of which the woman is herself altogether unconscious, that gradually turn a love for the boy into a love for the man, are told so delicately that it is only at last that the reader perceives what has in truth happened to the woman. She is angry with him, grateful to him, careful over him, gradually conscious of all his worth, and of all that he does to her and hers, till at last her heart is unable to resist. But then she is a widow;—and Beatrix has declared that her ambition will not allow her to marry so humble a swain, and Esmond has become—as he says of himself when he calls himself “an old gentleman”—“the guardian of all the family,” fit to be the grandfather of you all.”

The character of Lady Castlewood has required more delicacy in its manipulation than perhaps any other which Thackeray has drawn. There is a mixture in it of self-negation and of jealousy, of gratefulness of heart and of the weary thoughtfulness of age, of occasional sprightliness with deep melancholy, of injustice with a thorough appreciation of the good around her, of personal weakness—as shown always in her intercourse with her children, and of per-

sonal strength—as displayed when she vindicates the position of her kinsman Henry to the Duke of Hamilton, who is about to marry Beatrix ;—a mixture which has required a master's hand to trace. These contradictions are essentially feminine. Perhaps it must be confessed that in the unreasonableness of the woman, the author has intended to bear more harshly on the sex than it deserves. But a true woman will forgive him, because of the truth of Lady Castlewood's heart. Her husband had been killed in a duel, and there were circumstances which had induced her at the moment to quarrel with Harry and to be unjust to him. He had been ill, and had gone away to the wars, and then she had learned the truth, and had been wretched enough. But when he comes back, and she sees him, by chance at first, as the anthem is being sung in the cathedral choir, as she is saying her prayers, her heart flows over with tenderness to him. "I knew you would come back," she said ; "and to-day, Henry, in the anthem when they sang it—'When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream'—I thought, yes, like them that dream—them that dream. And then it went on, 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and he that goeth forth and weepeth shall doubtless come home again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' I looked up from the book and saw you. I was not surprised when I saw you. I knew you would come, my dear, and saw the gold sunshine round your head." And so it goes on running into expressions of heart-melting tenderness. And yet she herself does not know that her own heart is seeking his with all a woman's love. "She is still willing that he should possess Beatrix. "I would call you my son," she says, "sooner than the greatest prince in Europe." But she warns him of the nature of her own girl. "'Tis for my poor Beatrix I tremble, whose headstrong will affrights me, whose jealous temper, and whose vanity no prayers of mine can cure." It is but very gradually that Esmond becomes aware of the truth. Indeed, he has not become altogether aware of it till the tale closes. The reader does not see that transfer of affection from the daughter to the mother which would fail to reach his sympathy. In the last page of the last chapter it is told that it is so—that Esmond marries Lady Castlewood—but it is not told till all the incidents of the story have been completed.

But of the three characters I have named, Beatrix is the one that has most strongly exercised the writer's powers, and will most interest the reader. As far as outward person is concerned, she is very lovely—so charming that every man that comes near to her submits himself to her attractions and caprices. It is but rarely that a novelist can succeed in impressing his reader with a sense of female loveliness. The attempt is made so frequently—comes so much as a matter of course in every novel that is written, and fails so much as a matter of course, that the reader does not feel the failure. There are

things which we do not expect to have done for us in literature, because they are done so seldom. Novelists are apt to describe the rural scenes among which their characters play their parts, but seldom leave any impression of the places described. Even in poetry how often does this occur? The words used are pretty, well chosen, perhaps musical to the ear, and in that way besetting; but unless the spot has violent characteristics of its own, such as Burley's cave or the waterfall of Lodore, no striking portrait is left. Nor are we disappointed as we read, because we have not been taught to expect it to be otherwise. So it is with those word-painted portraits of women, which are so frequently given and so seldom convey any impression. Who has an idea of the outside look of Sophia Western, or Edith Bellenden, or even of Imogen, though Iachimo, who described her, was so good at words? A series of pictures—illustrations—as we have with Dickens' novels, and with Thackeray's, may leave an impression of a figure—though even then not often of feminine beauty. But in this work Thackeray has succeeded in imbuing us with a sense of the outside loveliness of Beatrix by the mere force of words. We are not only told it, but we feel that she was such a one as a man cannot fail to covet, even when his judgment goes against his choice.

Here the judgment goes altogether against the choice. The girl grows up before us from her early youth till her twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth year, and becomes—such as her mother described her—one whose headlong will, whose jealousy, and whose vanity nothing could restrain. She has none of those soft foibles, half allied to virtues, by which weak women fall away into misery or perhaps distraction. She does not want to love or to be loved. She does not care to be fondled. She has no longing for caresses. She wants to be admired—and to make use of the admiration she shall achieve for the material purposes of her life. She wishes to rise in the world; and her beauty is the sword with which she must open her oyster. As to her heart, it is a thing of which she becomes aware, only to assure herself that it must be laid aside and put out of the question. Now and again Esmond touches it. She just feels that she has a heart to be touched. But she never has a doubt as to her conduct in that respect. She will not allow her dreams of ambition to be disturbed by such folly as love.

In all that there might be something, if not good and great, nevertheless grand, if her ambition, though worldly, had in it a touch of nobility. But this poor creature is made with her bleared blind eyes to fall into the very lowest depths of feminine ignobility. One lover comes after another. Harry Esmond is, of course, the lover with whom the reader interests himself. At last there comes a duke—fifty years old, indeed, but with semi-royal appanages. As to his wife she will become a duchess, with many diamonds, and be Her Excellency. The man is stern, cold, and jealous; but she does not



doubt for a moment. She is to be Duchess of Hamilton, and towers already in pride of place above her mother, and her kinsman lover, and all her belongings. The story here, with its little incidents of birth, and blood, and ignoble pride, and gratified ambition, with a dash of true feminine nobility on the part of the girl's mother, is such as to leave one with the impression that it has hardly been beaten in English prose fiction. Then, in the last moment, the duke is killed in a duel, and the news is brought to the girl by Esmond. She turns upon him and rebukes him harshly. Then she moves away, and feels in a moment that there is nothing left for her in this world, and that she can only throw herself upon devotion for consolation. "I am best in my own room and by myself," she said. Her eyes were quite dry, nor did Esmond ever see them otherwise, save once, in respect of that grief. She gave him a cold hand as she went out. "Thank you, brother," she said in a low voice, and with a simplicity more touching than tears; "all that you have said is true and kind, and I will go away and will ask pardon."

But the consolation coming from devotion did not go far with such a one as her. We cannot rest on religion merely by saying that we will do so. Very speedily there comes consolation in another form. Queen Anne is on her deathbed, and a young Stuart prince appears upon the scene, of whom some loyal hearts dream that they can make a king. He is such as the Stuarts were, and only walks across the novelist's canvas to show his folly and heartlessness. But there is a moment in which Beatrix thinks that she may rise in the world to the proud place of a royal mistress. That is her last ambition! The bleared eyes can see no clearer than that. But the mock prince passes away, and nothing but the disgrace of the wish remains.

Such is the story of *Esmond*, leaving with it, as does all Thackeray's work, a melancholy conviction of the vanity of all things human. *Vanitas vanitatum*, as he wrote on the pages of the French lady's album, and again in one of the earlier numbers of *The Cornhill Magazine*. With much that is picturesque, much that is droll, much that is valuable as being a correct picture of the period selected, the gist of the book is melancholy throughout. It ends with the promise of happiness to come, but that is contained merely in a concluding paragraph. The one woman, during the course of the story, becomes a widow, with a living love for which she has no hope, with children for whom her fears are almost stronger than her affection, who never can rally herself to happiness for a moment. The other, with all her beauty and all her brilliance, becomes what we have described—and marries at last her brother's tutor, who becomes a bishop by means of her intrigues. Esmond, the hero, who is compounded of all good gifts, after a childhood and youth tinged throughout with melancholy, vanishes from us, with promise that he is to be rewarded by the hand of the mother of the girl he has loved.

And yet there is not a page in the book over which a thoughtful reader cannot pause with delight. The nature in it is true nature. Given a story thus sad, and persons thus situated, and it is thus that the details would follow each other, and thus that the people would conduct themselves. It was the tone of Thackeray's mind to turn away from the prospect of things joyful, and to see—or believe that he saw—in all human affairs, the seed of something base, of something which would be antagonistic to true contentment. All his snobs, and all his fools, and all his knaves, come from the same conviction. Is it not the doctrine on which our religion is founded—though the sadness of it there is alleviated by the doubtful promise of a heaven?

Though thrice a thousand years are passed  
 Since David's son, the sad and splendid,  
 The weary king ecclesiast  
 Upon his awful tablets penned it.

So it was that Thackeray preached his sermon. But melancholy though it be, the lesson taught in *Esmond* is salutary from beginning to end. The sermon truly preached is that glory can only come from that which is truly glorious, and that the results of meanness end always in the mean. No girl will be taught to wish to shine like Beatrix, nor will any youth be made to think that to gain the love of such a one it can be worth his while to expend his energy or his heart.

*Esmond* was published in 1852. It was not till 1858, some time after he had returned from his lecturing tours, that he published the sequel called *The Virginians*. It was first brought out in twenty-four monthly numbers, and ran through the years 1858 and 1859, Messrs. Bradbury and Evans having been the publishers. It takes up by no means the story of *Esmond*, and hardly the characters. The twin lads, who are called the Virginians, and whose name is Warrington, are grandsons of Esmond and his wife Lady Castlewood. Their one daughter, born at the estate in Virginia, had married a Warrington, and the Virginians are the issue of that marriage. In the story, one is sent to England, there to make his way; and the other is for awhile supposed to have been killed by the Indians. How he was not killed, but after awhile comes again forward in the world of fiction, will be found in the story, which it is not our purpose to set forth here. The most interesting part of the narrative is that which tells us of the later fortunes of Madame Beatrix—the Baroness Bernstein—the lady who had in her youth been Beatrix Esmond, who had then condescended to become Mrs. Tusher, the tutor's wife, whence she rose to be the "lady" of a bishop, and, after the bishop had been put to rest under a load of marble, had become the baroness—a rich old woman, courted by all her relatives because of her wealth.

In *The Virginians*, as a work of art, is discovered, more strongly than had shown itself yet in any of his works, that propensity to wandering which came to Thackeray because of his idleness. It is, I think, to be found in every book he ever wrote—except *Esmond*; but is here more conspicuous than it had been in his earlier years. Though he can settle himself down to his pen and ink—not always even to that without a struggle, but to that with sufficient burst of energy to produce a large average amount of work—he cannot settle himself down to the task of contriving a story. There have been those—and they have not been bad judges of literature—who have told me that they have best liked these vague narratives. The mind of the man has been clearly exhibited in them. In them he has spoken out his thoughts, and given the world to know his convictions, as well as could have been done in the carrying out any well-conducted plot. And though the narratives be vague the characters are alive. In *The Virginians*, the two young men and their mother and the other ladies with whom they have to deal, and especially their aunt, the Baronness Bernstein, are all alive. For desultory reading, for that picking up of a volume now and again which requires permission to forget the plot of a novel, this novel is admirably adapted. There is not a page of it vacant or dull. But he who takes it up to read as a whole, will find that it is the work of a desultory writer, to whom it is not unfrequently difficult to remember the incidents of his own narrative. “How good it is, even as it is!—but if he would have done his best for us, what might he not have done?” This, I think, is what we feel when we read *The Virginians*. The author’s mind has in one way been active enough—and powerful, as it always is; but he has been unable to fix it to an intended purpose, and has gone on from day to day furthering the difficulty he has intended to master, till the book, under the stress of circumstances—demands for copy and the like—has been completed before the difficulty has even in truth been encountered

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THACKERAY’S BURLESQUES.

As so much of Thackeray’s writing partakes of the nature of burlesque, it would have been unnecessary to devote a separate chapter to the subject, were it not that there are among his tales two or three so exceedingly good of their kind, coming so entirely up to our idea of what a prose burlesque should be, that were I to omit to mention them I should pass over a distinctive portion of our author’s work.



The volume called *Burlesques*, published in 1869, begins with the *Novels by Eminent Hands*, and *Jeames's Diary*, to which I have already alluded. It contains also *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, *A Legend of the Rhine*, and *Rebecca and Rowena*. It is of these that I will now speak. *The History of the Next French Revolution* and *Cox's Diary*, with which the volume is concluded, are, according to my thinking, hardly equal to the others ; nor are they so properly called burlesques.

Nor will I say much of Major Gahagan, though his adventures are very good fun. He is a warrior—that is of course—and he is one in whose wonderful narrative all that distant India can produce in the way of boasting is superadded to Ireland's best efforts in the same line. Baron Munchausen was nothing to him ; and to the bare and simple miracles of the baron is joined that humour without which Thackeray never tells any story. This is broad enough, no doubt, but is still humour—as when the major tells us that he always kept in his own apartment a small store of gunpowder, “always keeping it under my bed, with a candle burning for fear of accidents.” Or when he describes his courage: “I was running—running as the brave stag before the hounds—running, as I have done a great number of times in my life, when there was no help for it but a run.” Then he tells us of his digestion. “Once in Spain I ate the leg of a horse, and was so eager to swallow this morsel, that I bolted the shoe as well as the hoof, and never felt the slightest inconvenience from either.” He storms a citadel, and has only a snuff-box given him for his reward. “Never mind,” says Major Gahagan; “when they want me to storm a fort again, I shall know better.” By which we perceive that the major remembered his Horace, and had in his mind the soldier who had lost his purse. But the major's adventures, excellent as they are, lack the continued interest which is attached to the two following stories.

Of what nature is *The Legend of the Rhine*, we learn from the commencement. “It was in the good old days of chivalry, when every mountain that bathes its shadow in the Rhine had its castle; not inhabited as now by a few rats and owls, nor covered with moss and wallflowers and funguses and creeping ivy. No, no; where the ivy now clusters there grew strong portcullis and bars of steel; where the wallflowers now quiver in the ramparts there were silken banners embroidered with wonderful heraldry; men-at-arms marched where now you shall only see a bank of moss or a hideous black champignon; and in place of the rats and owlets, I warrant me there were ladies and knights to revel in the great halls, and to feast and dance, and to make love there.” So that we know well beforehand of what kind will this story be. It will be pure romance—burlesqued. “Ho sene-schal, fill me a cup of hot liquor; put sugar in it, good fellow; yea, and a little hot water—but very little, for my soul is sad as I think of those days and knights of old.”

A knight is riding alone on his war-horse, with all his armour with him—and his luggage. His rank is shown by the name on his port-manteau, and his former address and present destination by a card which was attached. It had run, "Count Ludwig de Hombourg, Jerusalem, but the name of the Holy City had been dashed out with the pen, and that of Godesberg substituted." "By St. Hugo of Katzenellenbogen," said the good knight, shivering, "'tis colder here than at Damascus. Shall I be at Godesberg in time for dinner?" He has come to see his friend Count Karl, Margrave of Godesberg.

But at Godesberg everything is in distress and sorrow. There is a new inmate there, one Sir Gottfried, since whose arrival the knight of the castle has become a wretched man, having been taught to believe all evils of his wife, and of his child Otto, and a certain stranger, one Hildebrandt. Gottfried, we see with half an eye, has done it all. It is in vain that Ludwig de Hombourg tells his old friend Karl that this Gottfried is a thoroughly bad fellow, that he had been found to be a card sharper in the Holy Land, and had been drummed out of his regiment. "'Twas but some silly quarrel over the wine-cup," says Karl. "Hugo de Brodenel would have no black bottle on the board." We think we can remember the quarrel of "Brodenel" and the black bottle, though so many things have taken place since that.

There is a festival in the castle, and Hildebrandt comes with the other guests. Then Ludwig's attention is called by poor Karl, the father, to a certain family likeness. Can it be that he is not the father of his own child? He is playing cards with his friend Ludwig when that traitor Gottfried comes and whispers to him, and makes an appointment. "I will be there too," thought Count Ludwig, the good Knight of Hombourg.

On the next morning, before the stranger knight had shaken off his slumbers, all had been found out and everything done. The lady had been sent to a convent and her son to a monastery. The knight of the castle has no comfort but in his friend Gottfried, a distant cousin who is to inherit everything. All this is told to Sir Ludwig—who immediately takes steps to repair the mischief. "A cup of coffee straight," says he to the servitors. "Bid the cook pack me a sausage and bread in paper, and the groom saddle Streithengst. We have far to ride." So this redresser of wrongs starts off, leaving the Margrave in his grief.

Then there is a great fight between Sir Ludwig and Sir Gottfried, admirably told in the manner of the latter chroniclers—a hermit sitting by and describing everything almost as well as Rebecca did on the tower. Sir Ludwig being in the right, of course gains the day. But the escape of the fallen knight's horse is the cream of this chapter. "Away, ay, away!—away amid the green vineyards and golden cornfields; away up the steep mountains, where he frightened the eagles in their eyries; away down the clattering ravines, where the

flashing cataracts tumble ; away through the dark pine-forests, where the hungry wolves are howling ; away over the dreary wolds, where the wild wind walks alone ; away through the splashing quagmires, where the will-o'-the-wisp slunk frightened among the reeds ; away through light and darkness, storm and sunshine ; away by tower and town, highroad and hamlet. . . . Brave horse ! gallant steed ! snorting child of Araby ! On went the horse, over mountains, rivers, turnpikes, applewomen ; and never stopped until he reached a livery-stable in Cologne, where his master was accustomed to put him up !”

The conquered knight, Sir Gottfried, of course reveals the truth. This Hildebrandt is no more than the lady's brother—as it happened a brother in disguise—and hence the likeness. Wicked knights, when they die, always divulge their wicked secrets, and this knight Gottfried does so now. Sir Ludwig carries the news home to the afflicted husband and father ; who of course instantly sends off messengers for his wife and son. The wife won't come. All she wants is to have her dresses and jewels sent to her. Of so cruel a husband she has had enough. As for the son, he has jumped out of a boat on the Rhine, as he was being carried to his monastery, and was drowned !

But he was not drowned, but had only dived. “The gallant boy swam on beneath the water, never lifting his head for a single moment between Godesberg and Cologne ; the distance being twenty-five or thirty miles.”

Then he becomes an archer, dressed in green from head to foot. How it was is all told in the story ; and he goes to shoot for a prize at the Castle of Adolf the Duke of Cleves. On his way he shoots a raven marvellously—almost as marvellously as did Robin Hood the twig in Ivanhoe. Then one of his companions is married, or nearly married, to the mysterious “Lady of Windeck”—would have been married but for Otto, and that the bishop and dean, who were dragged up from their long-ago graves to perform the ghostly ceremony, were prevented by the ill-timed mirth of a certain old canon of the church named Schidnischmidt. The reader has to read the name out loud before he recognizes an old friend. But this of the Lady of Windeck is an episode.

How at the shooting-match, which of course ensued, Otto shot for and won the heart of a fair lady, the duke's daughter, need not be told here, nor how he quarrelled with the Rowski of Donnerblitz—the hideous and sulky, but rich and powerful, nobleman who had come to take the hand, whether he could win the heart or not, of the daughter of the duke. It is all arranged according to the proper and romantic order. Otto, though he enlists in the duke's archer-guard as simple soldier, contrives to fight with the Rowski de Donnerblitz, Margrave of Eulenschrenkenstein, and of course kills him. ““Yield, yi ld, Sir Rowski !” shouted he, in a calm voice. A blow dealt madly at his head was the reply. It was the last blow that the Count of Eu



lenschrenkenstein ever struck in battle. The curse was on his lips as the crashing steel descended into his brain and split it in two. He rolled like a dog from his horse, his enemy's knee was in a moment on his chest, and the dagger of mercy at his throat, as the knight once more called upon him to yield." The knight was of course the archer who had come forward as an unknown champion, and had touched the Rowski's shield with the point of his lance. For this story, as well as the rest, is a burlesque on our dear old favourite Ivanhoe.

That everything goes right at last, that the wife comes back from her monastery, and joins her jealous husband, and that the duke's daughter has always, in truth, known that the poor archer was a noble knight—these things are all matters of course.

But the best of the three burlesques is *Rebecca and Rowena, or a Romance upon Romance*, which I need not tell my readers is a continuation of *Ivanhoe*. Of this burlesque it is the peculiar characteristic that, while it has been written to ridicule the persons and the incidents of that perhaps the most favourite novel in the English language, it has been so written that it would not have offended the author had he lived to read it, nor does it disgust or annoy those who most love the original. There is not a word in it having an intention to belittle Scott. It has sprung from the genuine humour created in Thackeray's mind by his aspect of the romantic. We remember how reticent, how dignified was Rowena—how cold we perhaps thought her, whether there was so little of that billing and cooing, that kissing and squeezing, between her and Ivanhoe which we used to think necessary to lovers' blisses. And there was left, too, on our minds an idea that Ivanhoe had liked the Jewess almost as well as Rowena, and that Rowena might possibly have become jealous. Thackeray's mind at once went to work and pictured to him a Rowena such as such a woman might become after marriage; and as Ivanhoe was of a melancholy nature and apt to be hipped, and grave, and silent, as a matter of course Thackeray presumes him to have been henpecked after his marriage.

Our dear Wamba disturbs his mistress in some devotional conversation with her chaplain, and the stern lady orders that the fool shall have three-dozen lashes. "I got you out of Front de Bœuf's castle," said poor Wamba, piteously appealing to Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, "and canst thou not save me from the lash?"

"Yes; from Front de Bœuf's castle, *when you were locked up with the Jewess in the tower!*" said Rowena, haughtily replying to the timid appeal of her husband. "Gurth, give him four-dozen"—and this was all poor Wamba got by applying for the mediation of his master. Then the satirist moralises: "Did you ever know a right-minded woman pardon another for being handsomer and more love-worthy than herself?" Rowena is "always flinging Rebecca into Ivanhoe's teeth;" and altogether life at Rotherwood, as described by the later chroni-

cles, is not very happy even when most domestic. Ivanhoe becomes sad and moody. He takes to drinking, and his lady does not forget to tell him of it. "Ah, dear axe!" he exclaims, apostrophising his weapon, "ah, gentle steel! that was a merry time when I sent thee crashing into the pate of the Emir Abdul Melek!" There was nothing left to him but his memories; and "in a word, his life was intolerable." So he determines that he will go and look after King Richard, who of course was wandering abroad. He anticipates a little difficulty with his wife; but she is only too happy to let him go, comforting herself with the idea that Athelstane will look after her. So her husband starts on his journey. "Then Ivanhoe's trumpet blew. Then Rowena waved her pocket-handkerchief. Then the household gave a shout. Then the pursuivant of the good knight, Sir Wilfrid the Crusader, flung out his banner—which was argent, a gules cramoisie with three Moors impaled—then Wamba gave a lash on his mule's haunch, and Ivanhoe, heaving a great sigh, turned the tail of his war-horse upon the castle of his fathers."

Ivanhoe finds Cœur de Lion besieging the Castle of Chalons, and there they both do wondrous deeds, Ivanhoe always surpassing the king. The jealousy of the courtiers, the ingratitude of the king, and the melancholy of the knight, who is never comforted except when he has slaughtered some hundreds, are delightful. Roger de Backbite and Peter de Toadhole are intended to be quite real. Then his majesty sings, passing off as his own a song of Charles Lever's. Sir Wilfrid declares the truth, and twits the king with his falsehood, whereupon he has the guitar thrown at his head for his pains. He catches the guitar, however, gracefully in his left hand, and sings his own immortal ballad of *King Canute*—than which Thackeray never did anything better.

"Might I stay the sun above us, good Sir Bishop?" Canute cried;  
 "Could I bid the silver moon to pause upon her heavenly ride?  
 If the moon obeys my orders, sure I can command the tide.

"Will the advancing waves obey me, Bishop, if I make the sign?"  
 Said the bishop, bowing lowly: "Land and sea, my lord, are thine."  
 Canute turned towards the ocean: "Back," he said, "thou foaming brine."

But the sullen ocean answered with a louder, deeper roar,  
 And the rapid waves drew nearer, falling, sounding on the shore;  
 Back the keeper and the bishop, back the king and courtiers bore.

We must go to the book to look at the picture of the king as he is killing the youngest of the sons of the Count of Chalons. Those illustrations of Doyle's are admirable. The size of the king's head, and the size of his battle-axe, as contrasted with the size of the child, are burlesque all over. But the king has been wounded by a bolt from the bow of Sir Bertrand de Gourdon, while he is slaughtering

the infant, and there is an end of him. Ivanhoe, too, is killed at the siege—Sir Roger de Backbite having stabbed him in the back during the scene. Had he not been then killed, his widow Rowena could not have married Athelstane, which she soon did after hearing the sad news; nor could he have had that celebrated epitaph in Latin and English:

Hic est Guilfridus, belli dum vixit avidus.  
Cum gladeo et lancea Normannia et quoque Francia  
Verbera dura dabat. Per Turcos multum equitabat.  
Guilbertum occidit;—atque Hierosolyma vidit.  
Hen! nunc sub fossa sunt tanti militis ossa.  
Uxor Athelstani est conjux castissima Thani.\*

The translation, we are told, was by Wamba:

Under the stone you behold,  
Buried and confined and cold,  
Lieth Sir Wilfrid the Bold.

Brian, the Templar untrue,  
Fairly in tourney he slew;  
Saw Hierusalem too.

Always he marched in advance,  
Warring in Flanders and France,  
Doughty with sword and with lance.

Now he is buried and gone,  
Lying beneath the gray stone.  
Where shall you find such a one?

Famous in Saracen fight,  
Rode in his youth, the Good Knight,  
Scattering Paynims in flight,

Long time his widow deplored,  
Weeping the fate of her lord,  
Sadly cut off by the sword.

When she was eased of her pain,  
Came the good lord Athelstane,  
When her ladyship married again.

The next chapter begins naturally as follows: "I trust nobody will suppose, from the events described in the last chapter, that our friend Ivanhoe is really dead." He is of course cured of his wounds, though they take six years in the curing. And then he makes his way back to Rotherwood, in a friar's disguise, much as he did on that former occasion when we first met him, and there is received by Athelstane and Rowena—and their boy!—while Wamba sings him a song:

Then you know the worth of a lass,  
Once you have come to forty year!

No one, of course, but Wamba knows Ivanhoe, who roams about the country, melancholy—as he of course would be—charitable—as he perhaps might be—for we are specially told that he had a large

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\* I doubt that Thackeray did not write the Latin epitaph, but I hardly dare suggest the name of any author. The "vixit avidus" is quite worthy of Thackeray; but had he tried his hand at such mode of expression he would have done more of it. I should like to know whether he had been in company with Father Prout at the time.



fortune and nothing to do with it, and slaying robbers wherever he met them—but sad at heart all the time. Then there comes a little burst of the author's own feelings, while he is burlesquing. "Ah, my dear friends and British public, are there not others who are melancholy under a mask of gaiety, and who in the midst of crowds are lonely? Liston was a most melancholy man; Grimaldi had feelings; and then others I wot of. But psha!—let us have the next chapter." In all of which there was a touch of earnestness.

Ivanhoe's griefs were enhanced by the wickedness of King John, under whom he would not serve. "It was Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, I need scarcely say, who got the Barons of England to league together and extort from the king that famous instrument and palladium of our liberties, at present in the British Museum, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury—The Magna Charta." Athelstane also quarrels with the king, whose orders he disobeys, and Rotherwood is attacked by the royal army. No one was of real service in the way of fighting except Ivanhoe—and how could he take up that cause? "No; he hanged to me," said the knight, bitterly. "This is a quarrel in which I can't interfere. Common politeness forbids. Let yonder ale-swilling Athelstane defend his—ha, ha!—*wife*; and my Lady Rowena guard her—ha, ha!—*son*!" and he laughed wildly and madly.

But Athelstane is killed—this time in earnest—and then Ivanhoe rushes to the rescue. He finds Gurth dead at the park-lodge; and though he is all alone—having outridden his followers—he rushes up the chestnut avenue to the house, which is being attacked. "An Ivanhoe! an Ivanhoe!" he bellowed out with a shout that overcame all the din of battle;—"Notre Dame à la recousse!" and to hurl his lance through the midriff of Reginald de Bracy, who was commanding the assault—who fell howling with anguish—to wave his battle-axe over his own head, and to cut off those of thirteen men-at-arms, was the work of an instant. "An Ivanhoe! an Ivanhoe!" he still shouted, and down went a man as sure as he said "hoe!"

Nevertheless he is again killed by multitudes, or very nearly—and has again to be cured by the tender nursing of Wamba. But Athelstane is really dead, and Rowena and the boy have to be found. He does his duty and finds them—just in time to be present at Rowena's death. She has been put in prison by King John, and is in extremis when her first husband gets to her. "Wilfrid, my early loved,"\* slowly gasped she, removing her gray hair from her furrowed temples, and gazing on her boy fondly as he nestled on Ivanhoe's knee—"promise me by St. Waltheof of Templestowe—promise me one boon!"

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\* There is something almost ill-natured in his treatment of Rowena, who is very false in her declarations of love;—and it is to be feared that by Rowena the author intends the normal married lady of English society.

"I do," said Ivanhoe, clasping the boy, and thinking that it was to that little innocent that the promise was intended to apply.

"By St. Waltheof?"

"By St. Waltheof!"

"Promise me, then," gasped Rowena, staring wildly at him, "that you will never marry a Jewess!"

"By St. Waltheof!" cried Ivanhoe, "but this is too much," and he did not make the promise.

"Having placed young Cedric at school at the Hall of Dotheboys, in Yorkshire, and arranged his family affairs, Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe quitted a country which had no longer any charm for him, as there was no fighting to be done, and in which his stay was rendered less agreeable by the notion that King John would hang him." So he goes forth and fights again, in league with the Knights of St. John—the Templars naturally having a dislike to him because of Brian de Bois Guilbert. "The only fault that the great and gallant, though severe and ascetic Folko of Heydenbraten, the chief of the Order of St. John, found with the melancholy warrior whose lance did such service to the cause, was that he did not persecute the Jews as so religious a knight should. So the Jews, in cursing the Christians, always excepted the name of the Desdichado—or the double disinherited, as he now was—the Desdichado Doblado." Then came the battle of Alarcos, and the Moors were all but in possession of the whole of Spain. Sir Wilfrid, like other good Christians, cannot endure this, so he takes ship in Bohemia, where he happens to be quartered, and has himself carried to Barcelona, and proceeds "to slaughter the Moors forthwith." Then there is a scene in which Isaac of York comes on as a messenger, to ransom from a Spanish knight, Don Beltram de Cuchilla y Trabuco, y Espada, y Espelon, a little Moorish girl. The Spanish knight of course murders the little girl instead of taking the ransom. Two hundred thousand dirhems are offered, however much that may be; but the knight, who happens to be in funds at the time, prefers to kill the little girl. All this is only necessary to the story as introducing Isaac of York. Sir Wilfrid is of course intent upon finding Rebecca. Through all his troubles and triumphs, from his gaining and his losing of Rowena, from the day on which he had been "*locked up with the Jewess in the tower*," he had always been true to her. "Away from me!" said the old Jew, tottering. "Away, Rebecca is—dead!" Then Ivanhoe goes out and kills fifty thousand Moors, and there is the picture of him—killing them.

But Rebecca is not dead at all. Her father had said so because Rebecca had behaved very badly to him. She had refused to marry the Moorish prince, or any of her own people, the Jews, and had gone as far as to declare her passion for Ivanhoe and her resolution to be a Christian. All the Jews and Jewesses in Valencia turned against her—so that she was locked up in the back-kitchen and almost

starved to death. But Ivanhoe found her, of course, and makes her Mrs. Ivanhoe, or Lady Wilfrid the second. Then Thackeray tells us how for many years he, Thackeray, had not ceased to feel that it ought to be so. "Indeed I have thought of it any time these five-and-twenty years—ever since, as a boy at school, I commenced the noble study of novels—ever since the day when, lying on sunny slopes, of half-holidays, the fair chivalrous figures and beautiful shapes of knights and ladies were visible to me, ever since I grew to love Rebecca, that sweetest creature of the poet's fancy, and longed to see her righted."

And so, no doubt, it had been. The very burlesque had grown from the way in which his young imagination had been moved by Scott's romance. He had felt, from the time of those happy half-holidays in which he had been lucky enough to get hold of the novel, that according to all laws of poetic justice, Rebecca, as being the more beautiful and the more interesting of the heroines, was entitled to the possession of the hero. We have all of us felt the same. But to him had been present at the same time all that is ludicrous in our ideas of middle-age chivalry ; the absurdity of its recorded deeds, the bloodthirstiness of its recreations, the selfishness of its men, the falseness of its honour, the cringing of its loyalty, the tyranny of its princes. And so there came forth Rebecca and Rowena, all broad fun from beginning to end, but never without a purpose—the best burlesque, as I think, in our language.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THACKERAY'S LECTURES.

IN speaking of Thackeray's life, I have said why and how it was that he took upon himself to lecture, and have also told the reader that he was altogether successful in carrying out the views proposed to himself. Of his peculiar manner of lecturing I have said but little, never having heard him. "He pounded along—very clearly," I have been told ; from which I surmise that there was no special grace of eloquence, but that he was always audible. I cannot imagine that he should have been ever eloquent. He could not have taken the trouble necessary with his voice, with his cadences, or with his outward appearance. I imagine that they who seem so naturally to fall into the proprieties of elocution have generally taken a great deal of trouble beyond that which the mere finding of their words has cost them. It is clearly to the matter of what he then gave the world, and not to the manner, that we must look for what interest is to be found in the lectures.



Those on *The English Humourists* were given first. The second set was on *The Four Georges*. In the volume now before us *The Georges* are printed first, and the whole is produced simply as a part of Thackeray's literary work. Looked at, however, in that light, the merit of the two sets of biographical essays is very different. In the one we have all the anecdotes which could be brought together respecting four of our kings—who as men were not peculiar, though their reigns were, and will always be, famous, because the country during the period was increasing greatly in prosperity, and was ever strengthening the hold it had upon its liberties. In the other set the lecturer was a man of letters dealing with men of letters, and himself a prince among humourists is dealing with the humourists of his own country and language. One could not imagine a better subject for such discourses from Thackeray's mouth than the latter. The former was not, I think, so good.

In discussing the lives of kings the biographer may trust to personal details or to historical facts. He may take the man, and say what good or evil may be said of him as a man ;—or he may take the period, and tell his readers what happened to the country while this or the other king was on the throne. In the case with which we are dealing, the lecturer had not time enough or room enough for real history. His object was to let his audience know of what nature were the men ; and we are bound to say that the pictures have not, on the whole, been flattering. It was almost necessary that with such a subject such should be the result. A story of family virtues, with princes and princesses well brought up, with happy family relations, all couleur de rose—as it would of course become us to write if we were dealing with the life of a living sovereign—would not be interesting. No one on going to hear Thackeray lecture on the Georges expected that. There must be some piquancy given, or the lecture would be dull ;—and the eulogy of personal virtues can seldom be piquant. It is difficult to speak fittingly of a sovereign, either living or not, long since gone. You can hardly praise such a one without flattery. You can hardly censure him without injustice. We are either ignorant of his personal doings or we know them as secrets, which have been divulged for the most part either falsely or treacherously—often both falsely and treacherously. It is better, perhaps, that we should not deal with the personalities of princes.

I believe that Thackeray fancied that he had spoken well of George III., and am sure that it was his intention to do so. But the impression he leaves is poor. "He is said not to have cared for Shakespeare or tragedy much ; farces and pantomimes were his joy ;—and especially when clown swallowed a carrot or a string of sausages, he would laugh so outrageously that the lovely princess by his side would have to say, 'My gracious monarch, do compose yourself.' 'George, be a king !' were the words which she"—his mother—

"was ever croaking in the ears of her son ; and a king the simple, stubborn, affectionate, bigoted man tried to be." "He did his best ; he worked according to his lights ; what virtues he knew he tried to practise ; what knowledge he could master he strove to acquire." If the lectures were to be popular, it was absolutely necessary that they should be written in this strain. A lecture simply laudatory on the life of St. Paul would not draw even the bench of bishops to listen to it ; but were a flaw found in the apostle's life, the whole Church of England would be bound to know all about it. I am quite sure that Thackeray believed every word that he said in the lectures, and that he intended to put in the good and the bad, honestly, as they might come to his hand. We may be quite sure that he did not intend to flatter the royal family ;—equally sure that he would not calumniate. There were, however, so many difficulties to be encountered that I cannot but think that the subject was ill-chosen. In making them so amusing as he did, and so little offensive, great ingenuity was shown.

I will now go back to the first series, in which the lecturer treated of Swift, Congreve, Addison, Steele, Prior, Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith. All these Thackeray has put in their proper order, placing the men from the date of their birth, except Prior, who was in truth the eldest of the lot, but whom it was necessary to depose, in order that the great Swift might stand first on the list, and Smollett, who was not born till fourteen years after Fielding, eight years after Sterne, and who has been moved up, I presume, simply from caprice. From the birth of the first to the death of the last, was a period of nearly a hundred years. They were never absolutely all alive together ; but it was nearly so, Addison and Prior having died before Smollett was born. Whether we should accept as humourists the full catalogue, may be a question ; though we shall hardly wish to eliminate any one from such a dozen of names. Pope we should hardly define as a humourist, were we to be seeking for a definition specially fit for him, though we shall certainly not deny the gift of humour to the author of *The Rape of the Lock*, or to the translator of any portion of *The Odyssey*. Nor should we have included Fielding or Smollett, in spite of Parson, Adams and Tabitha Bramble, unless anxious to fill a good company. That Hogarth was specially a humourist, no one will deny ; but in speaking of humourists, we should have presumed, unless otherwise notified, that humourists in letters only had been intended. As Thackeray explains clearly what he means by a humourist, I may as well here repeat the passage : "If humour only meant laughter, you would scarcely feel more interest about humorous writers than about the private life of poor Harlequin just mentioned, who possesses in common with these the power of making you laugh. But the men regarding whose lives and stories your kind presence here shows, that you have a curiosity and sympathy, appeal to a great number of our

other faculties, besides our mere sense of ridicule. The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness—your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture—your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak. Accordingly, as he finds, and speaks, and feels the truth best, we regard him, esteem him—sometimes love him. And as his business is to mark other people's lives and peculiarities, we moralize upon *his* life when he is gone—and yesterday's preacher becomes the text for to-day's sermon."

Having thus explained his purpose, Thackeray begins his task, and puts Swift in his front rank as a humourist. The picture given of this great man has very manifestly the look of truth, and if true is terrible indeed. We do, in fact, know it to be true—even though it be admitted that there is still room left for a book to be written on the life of the fearful dean. Here was a man endued with an intellect pellucid as well as brilliant; who could not only conceive but see also—with some fine instincts too; whom fortune did not flout; whom circumstances fairly served; but who, from first to last, was miserable himself, who made others miserable, and who deserved misery. Our business, during the page or two which we can give to the subject, is not with Swift, but with Thackeray's picture of Swift. It is painted with colours terribly strong and with shadows fearfully deep. "Would you like to have lived with him?" Thackeray asks. Then he says how pleasant it would have been to have passed some time with Fielding, Johnson, or Goldsmith. "I should like to have been Shakespeare's shoeblack," he says. "But Swift! If you had been his inferior in parts—and that, with a great respect for all persons present, I fear is only very likely—his equal in mere social station, he would have bullied, scorned, and insulted you. If, undeterred by his great reputation, you had met him like a man, he would have quailed before you and not had the pluck to reply—and gone home, and years after written a foul epigram upon you." There is a picture! "If you had been a lord with a blue riband, who flattered his vanity, or could help his ambition, he would have been the most delightful company in the world. . . . How he would have torn your enemies to pieces for you, and made fun of the Opposition! His servility was so boisterous that it looked like independence." He was a man whose mind was never fixed on high things, but was striving always after something which, little as it might be, and successful as he was, should always be out of his reach. It had been his misfortune to become a clergyman, because the way to church preferment seemed to be the readiest. He became, as we all know, a dean—but never a bishop, and was therefore wretched. Thackeray describes him as a clerical highwayman, seizing on all he could get. But "the



great prize has not yet come. The coach with the mitre and crozier in it, which he intends to have for *his* share, has been delayed on the way from St. James's; and he waits and waits till nightfall, when his runners come and tell him that the coach has taken a different way and escaped him. So he fires his pistol into the air with a curse, and rides away into his own country;”—or, in other words, takes a poor deanery in Ireland.

Thackeray explains very correctly, as I think, the nature of the weapons which the man used—namely, the words and style with which he wrote. “That Swift was born at No. 7, Hoey's Court, Dublin, on November 30, 1667, is a certain fact, of which nobody will deny the sister-island the honour and glory; but it seems to me he was no more an Irishman than a man born of English parents at Calcutta is a Hindoo. Goldsmith was an Irishman, and always an Irishman; Steele was an Irishman, and always an Irishman; Swift's heart was English and in England, his habits English, his logic eminently English; his statement is elaborately simple; he shuns tropes and metaphors, and uses his ideas and words with a wise thrift and economy, as he used his money with which he could be generous and splendid upon great occasions, but which he husbanded when there was no need to spend it. He never indulges in needless extravagance of rhetoric, lavish epithets, profuse imagery. He lays his opinions before you with a grave simplicity and a perfect neatness.” This is quite true of him, and the result is that though you may deny him sincerity, simplicity, humanity, or good taste, you can hardly find fault with his language.

Swift was a clergyman, and this is what Thackeray says of him in regard to his sacred profession. “I know of few things more conclusive as to the sincerity of Swift's religion, than his advice to poor John Gay to turn clergyman, and look out for a seat on the Bench. Gay, the author of *The Beggar's Opera*; Gay, the wildest of the wits about town! It was this man that Jonathan Swift advised to take orders, to mount in a cassock and bands—just as he advised him to husband his shillings, and put his thousand pounds out to interest.”

It was not that he was without religion—or without, rather, his religious beliefs and doubts, “for Swift,” says Thackeray, “was a reverent, was a pious spirit. For Swift could love and could pray.” Left to himself and to the natural thoughts of his mind, without those “orders” to which he had bound himself as a necessary part of his trade, he could have turned to his God with questionings which need not then have been heartbreaking. “It is my belief,” says Thackeray, that he suffered frightfully from the consciousness of his own scepticism and that he had bent his pride so far down as to put his apostasy out to hire.” I doubt whether any of Swift's works are very much read now, but perhaps *Gulliver's travels* are oftener in the hands of modern readers than any other. Of all the satires in our language, it is probably the

most cynical, the most absolutely illnatured, and therefore the falsest. Let those who care to form an opinion of Swift's mind from the best known of his works, turn to Thackeray's account of Gulliver. I can imagine no greater proof of misery than to have been able to write such a book as that.

It is thus that the lecturer concludes his lecture about Swift. "He shrank away from all affections sooner or later. Stella and Vanessa both died near him, and away from him. He had not heart enough to see them die. He broke from his fastest friend, Sheridan. He slunk away from his fondest admirer, Pope. His laugh jars on one's ear after seven-score years. He was always alone—alone and gnashing in the darkness, except when Stella's sweet smile came and shone on him. When that went, silence and utter night closed over him. An immense genius, an awful downfall and ruin! So great a man he seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling. We have other great names to mention—none, I think, however, so great or so gloomy." And so we pass on from Swift, feeling that though the man was certainly a humourist, we have had as yet but little to do with humour.

Congreve is the next who, however truly he may have been a humourist, is described here rather as a man of fashion. A man of fashion he certainly was, but is best known in our literature as a comedian—worshipping that Comic Muse to whom Thackeray hesitates to introduce his audience, because she is not only merry, but shameless also. Congreve's muse was about as bad as any muse that ever misbehaved herself—and I think as little amusing. "Reading in these plays now," says Thackeray, "is like shutting your ears and looking at people dancing. What does it mean?—the measures, the grimaces, the bowing, shuffling, and retreating, the cavaliers seul advancing upon those ladies—those ladies and men twirling round at the end in a mad galop, after which everybody bows and the quaint rite is celebrated?" It is always so with Congreve's plays, and Etherege's and Wycherley's. The world we meet there is not our world, and as we read the plays we have no sympathy with these unknown people. It was not that they lived so long ago. They are much nearer to me in time than the men and women who figured on the stage in the reign of James I. But their nature is farther from our nature. They sparkle, but never warm. They are witty, but leave no impression. I might also go further, and say that they are wicked, but never allure. "When Voltaire came to visit the great Congreve," says Thackeray, "the latter rather affected to despise his literary reputation; and in this, perhaps, the great Congreve was not far wrong. A touch of Steele's tenderness is worth all his finery; a flash of Swift's lightning, a beam of Addison's pure sunshine, and his tawdry playhouse taper is invisible. But the ladies loved him, and he was undoubtedly a pretty fellow."

There is no doubt as to the true humour of Addison, who next comes up before us, but I think that he makes hardly so good a subject for a lecturer as the great gloomy man of intellect, or the frivolous man of pleasure. Thackeray tells us all that is to be said about him as a humourist in so few lines that I may almost insert them on this page: "But it is not for his reputation as the great author of *Cato* and *The Campaign*, or for his merits as Secretary of State, or for his rank and high distinction as Lady Warwick's husband, or for his eminence as an examiner of political questions on the Whig side, or a guardian of British liberties, that we admire Joseph Addison. It is as a Tattler of small talk and a Spectator of mankind that we cherish and love him, and owe as much pleasure to him as to any human being that ever wrote. He came in that artificial age, and began to speak with his noble natural voice. He came the gentle satirist, who hit no unfair blow; the kind judge, who castigated only in smiling. While Swift went about hanging and ruthless, a literary Jeffreys, in Addison's kind court only minor cases were tried;—only peccadilloes and small sins against society, only a dangerous libertinism in tuckers and hoops, or a nuisance in the abuse of beaux canes and snuffboxes." Steele set *The Tatler* a-going. "But with his friend's discovery of *The Tatler*, Addison's calling was found, and the most delightful Tattler in the world began to speak. He does not go very deep. Let gentlemen of a profound genius, critics accustomed to the plunge of the bathos, console themselves by thinking that he couldn't go very deep. There is no trace of suffering in his writing. He was so good, so honest, so healthy, so cheerfully selfish—if I must use the word!"

Such was Addison as a humourist; and when the hearer shall have heard also—or the reader read—that this most charming Tattler also wrote *Cato*, became a Secretary of State, and married a countess, he will have learned all that Thackeray had to tell of him.

Steele was one who stood much less high in the world's esteem, and who left behind him a much smaller name—but was quite Addison's equal as a humourist and a wit. Addison, though he had the reputation of a toper, was respectability itself. Steele was almost always disreputable. He was brought from Ireland, placed at the Charter House, and then transferred to Oxford, where he became acquainted with Addison. Thackeray says that "Steele found Addison a stately college don at Oxford." The stateliness and the don's rank were attributable no doubt to the more sober character of the English lad, for, in fact, the two men were born in the same year, 1672. Steele, who during his life was affected by various different tastes, first turned himself to literature, but early in life was bitten by the hue of a red coat and became a trooper in the Horse Guards. To the end he vacillated in the same way. In that charming paper in *The Tatler*, in which he records his father's death, his mother's griefs, his own most solemn and tender emotions, he says he is interrupted by the ar-



rival of a hamper of wine, 'the same as is to be sold at Garraway's next week;' upon the receipt of which he sends for three friends, and they fall to instantly, drinking two bottles apiece, with great benefit to themselves, and not separating till two o'clock in the morning."

He had two wives, whom he loved dearly and treated badly. He hired grand houses, and bought fine horses for which he could never pay. He was often religious, but more often drunk. As a man of letters, other men of letters who followed him, such as Thackeray, could not be very proud of him. But everybody loved him; and he seems to have been the inventor of that flying literature which, with many changes in form and manner, has done so much for the amusement and edification of readers ever since his time. He was always commencing, or carrying on—often editing—some one of the numerous periodicals which appeared during his time. Thackeray mentions seven: *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The Englishman*, *The Lover*, *The Reader*, and *The Theatre*; that three of them are well known to this day—the three first named—and are to be found in all libraries, is proof that his life was not thrown away.

I almost question Prior's right to be in the list, unless, indeed, the mastery over well-turned conceits is to be included within the border of humour. But Thackeray had a strong liking for Prior, and in his own humorous way rebukes his audience for not being familiar with *The Town and Country Mouse*. He says that Prior's epigrams have the genuine sparkle, and compares Prior to Horace. "His song, his philosophy, his good sense, his happy, easy turns and melody, his loves and his epicureanism, bear a great resemblance to that most delightful and accomplished master." I cannot say that I agree with this. Prior is generally neat in his expression. Horace is happy—which is surely a great deal more.

All that is said of Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, and Fielding is worth reading, and may be of great value both to those who have not time to study the authors, and to those who desire to have their own judgments somewhat guided, somewhat assisted. That they were all men of humour there can be no doubt. Whether either of them, except perhaps Gay, would have been specially ranked as a humourist among men of letters, may be a question.

Sterne was a humourist, and employed his pen in that line, if ever a writer did so, and so was Goldsmith. Of the excellence and largeness of the disposition of the one, and the meanness and littleness of the other, it is not necessary that I should here say much. But I will give a short passage from our author as to each. He has been quoting somewhat at length from Sterne, and thus he ends: "And with this pretty dance and chorus the volume artfully concludes. Even here one can't give the whole description. There is not a page in Sterne's writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption—a hint as of an impure presence. Some of that dreary

double entendre may be attributed to freer times and manners than ours—but not all. The foul satyr's eyes leer out of the leaves constantly. The last words the famous author wrote were bad and wicked. The last lines the poor stricken wretch penned were for pity and pardon." Now a line or two about Goldsmith, and I will then let my reader go to the volume and study the lectures for himself. "The poor-fellow was never so friendless but that he could befriend some one; never so pinched and wretched but he could give of his crust, and speak his word of compassion. If he had but his flute left, he would give that, and make the children happy in the dreary London courts."

Of this, too, I will remind my readers—those who have bookshelves well-filled to adorn their houses—that Goldsmith stands in the front where all the young people see the volumes. There are few among the young people who do not refresh their sense of humour occasionally from that shelf; Sterne is relegated to some distant and high corner. The less often that he is taken down the better. Thackeray makes some half excuse for him because of the greater freedom of the times. But "the times" were the same for the two. Both Sterne and Goldsmith wrote in the reign of George II.; both died in the reign of George III.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THACKERAY'S BALLADS.

WE have a volume of Thackeray's poems, republished under the name of *Ballads*, which is, I think, to a great extent a misnomer. They are almost all readable, almost all good, full of humour, and with some fine touches of pathos, most happy in their versification, and, with a few exceptions, hitting well on the head the nail which he intended to hit. But they are not on that account ballads. Literally, a ballad is a song; but it has come to signify a short chronicle in verse, which may be political, or pathetic, or grotesque—or it may have all three characteristics or any two of them; but not on that account is any grotesque poem a ballad—nor, of course, any pathetic or any political poem. *Jacob Omnium's Hoss* may fairly be called a ballad, containing as it does a chronicle of a certain well-defined transaction; and the story of *King Canute* is a ballad—one of the best that has been produced in our language in modern years. But such pieces as those called *The End of the Play* and *Vanitas Vanitatum*, which are didactic as well as pathetic, are not ballads in the common sense; nor are such songs as *The Mahogany Tree*, or the little collection called *Love Songs made Easy*. The majority of the

pieces are not ballads ; but if they be good of the kind, we should be ungrateful to quarrel much with the name.

How very good most of them are, I did not know till I re-read them for the purpose of writing this chapter. There is a manifest falling off in some few—which has come from that source of literary failure which is now so common. If a man write a book or a poem because it is in him to write it—the motive power being altogether in himself, and coming from his desire to express himself—he will write it well, presuming him to be capable of the effort. But if he write his book or poem simply because a book or poem is required from him, let its capability be what it may, it is not unlikely that he will do it badly. Thackeray occasionally suffered from the weakness thus produced. A ballad from *Policeman X—Bow Street Ballads* they were first called—was required by *Punch*, and had to be forthcoming, whatever might be the poet's humour, by a certain time. *Jacob Omnium's Hoss* is excellent. His heart and feeling were all there, on behalf of his friend, and against that obsolete old court of justice. But we can tell well when he was looking through the police reports for a subject, and taking what chance might send him, without any special interest in the matter. *The Knight and the Lady of Bath*, and the *Damages Two Hundred Pounds*, as they were demanded at Guildford, taste as though they were written to order.

Here, in his verses as in his prose, the charm of Thackeray's works lies in the mingling of humour with pathos and indignation. There is hardly a piece that is not more or less funny, hardly a piece that is not satirical ;—and in most of them, for those who will look a little below the surface, there is something that will touch them. Thackeray, though he rarely uttered a word, either with his pen or his mouth, in which there was not an intention to reach our sense of humour, never was only funny. When he was most determined to make us laugh he had always a further purpose ; some pity was to be extracted from us on behalf of the sorrows of men, or some indignation of the evil done by them.

This is the beginning of that story as to the *Two Hundred Pounds*, for which, as a ballad, I do not care very much :

Special jurymen of England who admire your country's laws,  
And proclaim a British jury worthy of the nation's applause,  
Gaily compliment each other at the issue of a cause,  
Which was tried at Guilford 'sides, this day week as ever was.

Here he is indignant, not only in regard to some miscarriage of justice on that special occasion, but at the general unfitness of jurymen for the work confided to them. "Gaily compliment yourselves," he says, "on your beautiful constitution, from which come such beautiful results as those I am going to tell you !" When he reminded us that *Ivanhoe* had produced *Magna Charta*, there was a purpose of irony



even there in regard to our vaunted freedom. With all your Magna Charta and your juries, what are you but snobs? There is nothing so often misguided as general indignation, and I think that in his judgment of outside things, in the measure which he usually took of them, Thackeray was very frequently misguided. A satirist by trade will learn to satirise everything, till the light of the sun and the moon's loveliness will become evil and mean to him. I think that he was mistaken in his views of things. But we have to do with him as a writer, not as a political economist or as a politician. His indignation was all true, and the expression of it was often perfect. The lines in which he addresses that Pallis Court, at the end of *Jacob Omnium's Hoss*, are almost sublime.

O Pallis Court, you move  
My pity most profound.  
A most amusing sport  
You thought it, I'll be bound,  
To saddle up a three-pound debt,  
With two-and-twenty pound.

Good sport it is to you  
To grind the honest poor,  
To pay their just or unjust debts  
With eight hundred per cent., for Lor;  
Make haste and get your costes in,  
They will not last much mor!

Come down from that tribewn,  
Thou shameless and unjust;  
Thou swindle, picking pockets in  
The name of Truth august;  
Come down, thy hoary Blasphemy,  
For die thou shalt and must.

And go it, Jacob Homnium,  
And ply your iron pen,  
And rise up, Sir John Jervis,  
And shut me up that den;  
That sty for fattening lawyers in,  
On the bones of honest men.

“Come down from that tribewn, thou shameless and unjust!” It is impossible not to feel that he felt this as he wrote it.

There is a branch of his poetry which he calls—or which at any rate is now called—*Lyra Hybernica*, for which no doubt *The Groves of Blarney* was his model. There have been many imitations since, of which perhaps Barham's ballad on the coronation was the best, “When to Westminster the Royal Spinster and the Duke of Leinster all in order did repair!” Thackeray, in some of his attempts, has been equally droll and equally graphic. That on *The Cristal Palace*—not that at Sydenham, but its forerunner, the palace of the Great Exhibition—is very good, as the following catalogue of its contents will show:

There's holy saints  
And window paints,  
By Maydiayval Pugin;  
Alhamborough Jones  
Did paint the tones  
Of yellow and gambouge in.

There's fountains there  
And crosses fair;  
There's water-gods with urns;

There's organs three,  
To play, d'ye see?  
“God save the Queen,” by turns.

There's statues bright  
Of marble white,  
Of silver, and of copper;  
And some in zinc,  
And some, I think,  
That isn't over proper.

There's staym ingynes,  
That stands in lines,  
Enormous and amazing,  
That squeal and snort  
Like whales in sport,  
Or elephants a grazing.

There's carts and gigs,  
And pins for pigs,  
There's dibblers and there's harrows,  
And ploughs like toys  
For little boys.  
And iligant wheel-barrows.

For thim genteels  
Who ride on wheels,  
There's plenty to indulge 'em ;  
There's droskys snug  
From Payters-bug,  
And vayhycles from Belgium.

There's cabs on stands  
And shandthry danns ;  
There's waggons from New York  
here ;  
There's Lapland sleighs  
Have crossed the seas,  
And jaunting cyars from Cork here.

In writing this Thackeray was a little late with his copy for *Punch* ; not, we should say, altogether an uncommon accident to him. It should have been with the editor early on Saturday, if not before, but did not come till late on Saturday evening. The editor, who was among men the most good-natured, and I should think the most forbearing, either could not, or in this case would not, insert it in the next week's issue, and Thackeray, angry and disgusted, sent it to *The Times*. In *The Times* of next Monday it appeared—very much, I should think, to the delight of the readers of that august newspaper.

Mr. Molon's account of the ball given to the Nepaulese ambassadors by the Peninsular and Oriental Company, is so like Barham's coronation in the account it gives of the guests, that one would fancy it must be by the same hand.

The noble Chair\* stud at the stair  
And bade the dhrums to thump ; and he  
Did thus evince to that Black Prince  
The welcome of his Company.†

O fair the girls and rich the curls,  
And bright the oys you saw there was ;  
And fixed each oye you then could spoi  
On General Jung Bahawther was !

This ginerall great then tuck his sate,  
With all the other gneralls,  
Bedad his throat, his belt, his coat,  
All bleezed with precious minerals ;  
And as he there, with princely air,  
Reclouin on his cushion was.  
All round about his royal chair  
The squeezin and the pushin was.

O Put, such girls, such jukes and earls,  
Such fashion and nobilitee !  
Just think of Tim, and fancy him  
Amidst the high gentilitee !

\* Chair—i. e., Chairman.

† I. e., The P. and O. Company.

There was the Lord de L'Huys, and the Portygeese  
 Minister and his lady there,  
 And I recognised with much surprise,  
 Our messmate, Bob O'Grady, there.

All these are very good fun—so good in humour and so good in expression, that it would be needless to criticise their peculiar dialect, were it not that Thackeray has made for himself a reputation by his writing of Irish. In this he has been so entirely successful that for many English readers he has established a new language which may not improperly be called Hybernico-Thackerayan. If comedy is to be got from peculiarities of dialect, as no doubt it is, one form will do as well as another, so long as those who read it know no better. So it has been with Thackeray's Irish, for in truth he was not familiar with the modes of pronunciation which make up Irish brogue. Therefore, though he is always droll, he is not true to nature. Many an Irishman coming to London, not unnaturally tries to imitate the talk of Londoners. You or I, reader, were we from the West, and were the dear County Galway to send either of us to Parliament, would probably endeavour to drop the dear brogue of our country, and in doing so we should make some mistakes. It was these mistakes which Thackeray took for the natural Irish tone. He was amused to hear a major called "Meejor," but was unaware that the sound arose from Pat's affection of English softness of speech. The expression natural to the unadulterated Irishman would rather be "Ma-ajor." He discovers his own provincialism, and trying to be polite and urbane, he says "Meejor." In one of the lines I have quoted there occurs the word "troat." Such a sound never came naturally from the mouth of an Irishman. He puts in an h instead of omitting it, and says "dhrink." He comes to London, and finding out that he is wrong with his "dhrink," he leaves out all the h's he can, and thus comes to "troat." It is this which Thackeray has heard. There is a little piece called the *Last Irish Grievance*, to which Thackeray adds a still later grievance by the false sounds which he elicits from the calumniated mouth of the pretended Irish poet. Slaves are "sleeves," places are "pleeces," Lord John is "Lard Jahn," fatal is "fetal," danger is "deenger," and native is "neetive." All these are unintended slanders. Tea, Hibernicé, is "tay," please is "plaise," sea is "say," and ease is "aise." The softer sound of e is broadened out by natural Irishman—not, to my ear, without a certain euphony; but no one in Ireland says or hears the reverse. The Irishman who in London might talk of his "neetive" race, would be mincing his words to please the ear of the cockney.

*The Chronicle of the Drum* would be a true ballad all through, were it not that there is tacked on to it a long moral in an altered metre. I do not much value the moral, but the ballad is excellent.



not only in much of its versification and in the turns of its language, but in the quaint and true picture it gives of the French nation. The drummer, either by himself or by some of his family, has drummed through a century of French battling, caring much for his country and its glory, but understanding nothing of the causes for which he is enthusiastic. Whether for King, Republic, or Emperor, whether fighting and conquering or fighting and conquered, he is happy as long as he can beat his drum on a field of glory. But throughout his adventures there is a touch of chivalry about our drummer. In all the episodes of his country's career he feels much of patriotism and something of tenderness. It is thus he sings during the days of the Revolution :

We had taken the head of King Capet,  
 We called for the blood of his wife ;  
 Undaunted she came to the scaffold,  
 And bared her fair neck to the knife.  
 As she felt the foul fingers that touched her,  
 She shrank, but she deigned not to speak ;  
 She looked with a royal disdain,  
 And died with a blush on her cheek !

'Twas thus that our country was saved !  
 So told us the Safety Committee !  
 But, psha, I've the heart of a soldier—  
 All gentleness mercy and pity.  
 I loathed to assist at such deeds,  
 And my drum beat its loudest of tunes,  
 As we offered to justice offended,  
 The blood of the bloody tribunes.

Away with such foul recollections !  
 No more of the axe and the block.  
 I saw the last fight of the sections,  
 As they fell 'neath our guns at St. Rock.  
 Young Bonaparte led us that day.

And so it goes on. I will not continue the stanza, because it contains the worst rhyme that Thackeray ever permitted himself to use. *The Chronicle of the Drum* has not the finish which he achieved afterwards, but it is full of national feeling, and carries on its purpose to the end with an admirable persistency :

A curse on those British assassins  
 Who ordered the slaughter of Ney ;  
 A curse on Sir Hudson who tortured  
 The life of our hero away.  
 A curse on all Russians—I hate them ;  
 On all Prussian and Austrian fry ;  
 And, oh, but I pray we may meet them  
 And fight them again ere I die.

*The White Squall*—which I can hardly call a ballad, unless any

description of a scene in verse may be included in the name—is surely one of the most graphic descriptions ever put into verse. Nothing written by Thackeray shows more plainly his power over words and rhymes. He draws his picture without a line omitted or a line too much, saying with apparent facility all that he has to say, and so saying it that every word conveys its natural meaning.

When a squall, upon a sudden,  
Came e'er the waters scudding ;  
And the clouds began to gather,  
And the sea was lashed to lather,  
And the lowering thunder grumbled,  
And the lightning jumped and tumbled,  
And the ship and all the ocean  
Woke up in wild commotion.  
Then the wind set up a howling,  
And the poodle-dog a yowling,  
And the cocks began a crowing,  
And the old cow raised a lowing,  
As she heard the tempest blowing ;  
And fowls and geese did cackle,  
And the cordage and the tackle  
Began to shriek and crackle ;  
And the spray dashed o'er the funnels,  
And down the deck in runnels ;  
And the rushing water soaks all,  
From the seamen in the fo'ksal  
To the stokers whose black faces  
Peer out of their bed-places ;  
And the captain, he was bawling,  
And the sailors pulling, hauling,  
And the quarter-deck tarpauling  
Was shivered in the squalling ;  
And the passengers awaken,  
Most pitifully shaken ;  
And the steward jumps up and hastens  
For the necessary basins.

Then the Greeks they groaned and quivered,  
And they knelt, and moaned, and shivered,  
As the plunging waters met them,  
And splashed and overset them ;  
And they call in their emergence  
Upon countless saints and virgins ;  
And their marrowbones are bended,  
And they think the world is ended.  
And the Turkish women for'ard  
Were frightened and behorror'd ;  
And shrieking and bewildering,  
The mothers clutched their children ;  
The men sang " Allah ! Illah !  
Mashallah Bis-millah ! "  
As the warning waters doused them,  
And splashed them and soused them ;  
And they called upon the Prophet,  
And thought but little of it.

Then all the fleas in Jewry  
Jumped up and bit like fury ;

And the progeny of Jacob  
 Did on the main-deck wake up.  
 (I wot these greasy Rabbins  
 Would never pay for cabins);  
 And each man moaned and jabbered in  
 His filthy Jewish gaberdine,  
 In woe and lamentation,  
 And howling consternation.  
 And the splashing water drenches  
 Their dirty brats and wenches;  
 And they crawl from bales and benches,  
 In a hundred thousand stench.  
 This was the White Squall famous,  
 Which latterly o'ercame us

*Peg of Limavaddy* has always been very popular, and the public have not, I think, been generally aware that the young lady in question lived in truth at Newton Limavady (with one d). But with the correct name Thackeray would hardly have been so successful with his rhymes.

Citizen or Squire,  
 Tory, Whig, or Radi-  
 Cal would all desire  
 Peg of Limavaddy.  
 Had I Homer's fire  
 Or that of Sergeant Taddy,  
 Meetly I'd admire  
 Peg of Limavaddy.  
 And till I expire  
 Or till I go mad I  
 Will sing unto my lyre  
 Peg of Limavaddy.

*The Cane-bottomed Chair* is another, better, I think, than *Peg of Limavaddy*, as containing that mixture of burlesque with the pathetic which belonged so peculiarly to Thackeray, and which was indeed the very essence of his genius.

But of all the cheap treasures that garnish my nest,  
 There's one that I love and I cherish the best  
 For the finest of couches that's padded with hair  
 I never would change thee, my cane-bottomed chair.

'Tis a bandy-legged, high-bottomed, worm-eaten seat,  
 With a creaking old back and twisted old feet;  
 But since the fair morning when Fanny sat there,  
 I bless thee and love thee, old cane-bottomed chair.

\* \* \* \*

She comes from the past and revisits my room,  
 She looks as she then did, all beauty and bloom;  
 So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair,  
 And yonder she sits in my cane-bottomed chair.

This, in the volume which I have now before me, is followed by a



picture of Fanny in the chair, to which I cannot but take exception. I am quite sure that when Fanny graced the room and seated herself in the chair of her old bachelor friend, she had not on a low dress and loosely-flowing drawing-room shawl, nor was there a footstool ready for her feet. I doubt also the headgear. Fanny on that occasion was dressed in her morning apparel, and had walked through the streets, carried no fan, and wore no brooch but one that might be necessary for pinning her shawl.

*The Great Cossack Epic* is the longest of the ballads. It is a legend of St. Sophia of Kioff, telling how Father Hyacinth, by the aid of St. Sophia, whose wooden statue he carried with him, escaped across the Borysthenes with all the Cossacks at his tail. It is very good fun, but not equal to many of the others. Nor is the *Carmen Lillienae* quite to my taste. I should not have declared at once that it had come from Thackeray's hand, had I not known it.

But who could doubt the *Bouillabaisse*? Who else could have written that? Who at the same moment could have been so merry and so melancholy—could have gone so deep into the regrets of life, with words so appropriate to its jollities? I do not know how far my readers will agree with me that to read it always must be a fresh pleasure; but in order that they may agree with me, if they can, I will give it to them entire. If there be one whom it does not please, he will like nothing that Thackeray ever wrote in verse.

#### THE BALLAD OF BOUILLABAISSE.

A street there is in Paris famous,  
For which no rhyme our language yields,  
Rue Neuve des Petits Champs its name is—  
The New Street of the Little Fields;  
And here's an inn, not rich and splendid,  
But still in comfortable case;  
The which in youth I oft attended,  
To eat a bowl of Bouillabaisse.

This Bouillabaisse a noble dish is—  
A sort of soup, or broth, or brew,  
Or hotch-potch of all sorts of fishes,  
That Greenwich never could outdo;  
Green herbs, red peppers, mussels, saffron,  
Soles, onions, garlic, roach, and dace;  
All these you eat at Terre's tavern,  
In that one dish of Bouillabaisse.

Indeed, a rich and savoury stew 'tis;  
And true philosophers, methinks,  
Who love all sorts of natural beauties,  
Should love good victuals and good drinks.  
And Cordelier or Benedictine  
Might gladly sure his lot embrace,  
Nor find a fast-day too afflicting  
Which served him up a Bouillabaisse.

I wonder if the house still there is ?

Yes, here the lamp is, as before ;

The smiling red-cheeked écaillère is

Still opening oysters at the door.

Is Terré still alive and able ?

I recollect his droll grimace ;

He'd come and smile before your table,

And hope you liked your Bouillabaisse.

We enter—nothing's changed or older.

"How's Monsieur Terré, waiter, pray ?"

The waiter stares and shrugs his shoulder—

"Monsieur is dead this many a day."

"It is the lot of saint and sinner ;

So honest Terré's run his race."

"What will Mousieur require for dinner ?"

"Say, do you still cook Bouillabaisse ?"

"Oh, oui, Monsieur," 's the waiter's answer,

"Quel vin Monsieur desire-t-il ?"

"Tell me a good one." "That I can, sir:

The chambertin with yellow seal."

"So Terré's gone," I say, and sink in

My old accusom'd corner-place ;

"He's done with feasting and with drinking,

With Burgundy and Bouillabaisse."

My old accustomed corner here is

The table still is in the nook ;

Ah ! vanish'd many a busy year is

This well-known chair since last I took,

When first I saw ye, cari luoghi,

I'd scarce a beard upon my face,

And now a grizzled, grim old foggy,

I sit and wait for Bouillabaisse.

Where are you, old companions trusty,

Of early days here met to dine ?

Come, waiter ! quick, a flagon crusty ;

I'll pledge them in the good old wine.

The kind old voices and old faces

My memory can quick retrace ;

Around the board they take their places

And share the wine and Bouillabaisse.

There's Jack has made a wondrous marriage ;

There's laughing Tom is laughing yet ;

There's brave Augustus drives his carriage ;

There's poor old Fred in the *Gazette* ;

O'er James's head the grass is growing.

Good Lord ! the world has wagged apace

Since here we set the claret flowing,

And drank, and ate the Bouillabaisse.

Ah me ! how quick the days are flitting !

I mind me of a time that's gone,

When here I'd sit, as now I'm sitting,

In this same place—but not alone.

A fair young face was nestled near me,  
 A dear, dear face looked fondly up,  
 And sweetly spoke and smiled to cheer me !  
 There's no one now to share my cup.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

I drink it as the Fates ordain it:  
 Come fill it, and have done with rhymes ;  
 Fill up the lonely glass, and drain it  
 In memory of dear old times.

Welcome the wine, whate'er the seal is ;  
 And sit you down and say your grace  
 With thankful heart, whate'er the meal is.  
 Here comes the smoking Bouillabaisse.

I am not disposed to say that Thackeray will hold a high place among English poets. He would have been the first to ridicule such an assumption made on his behalf. But I think that his verses will be more popular than those of many highly reputed poets, and that as years roll on they will gain rather than lose in public estimation.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THACKERAY'S STYLE AND MANNER OF WORK.

A NOVEL in style should be easy, lucid, and of course grammatical. The same may be said of any book ; but that which is intended to recreate should be easily understood—for which purpose lucid narration is an essential. In matter it should be moral and amusing. In manner it may be realistic, or sublime or ludicrous ; or it may be all these if the author can combine them. As to Thackeray's performance in style and matter I will say something further on. His manner was mainly realistic, and I will therefore speak first of that mode of expression which was peculiarly his own.

Realism in style has not all the ease which seems to belong to it, It is the object of the author who affects it so to communicate with his reader that all his words shall seem to be natural to the occasion. We do not think the language of Dogberry natural, when he tells neighbour Seacole that "to write and read comes by nature." That is ludicrous. Nor is the language of Hamlet natural when he shows to his mother the portrait of his father :

See what a grace was seated on this brow ;  
 Hyperion's curls ; the front of Jove himself ;  
 An eye like Mars, to threaten and command.



That is sublime. Constance is natural when she turns away from the Cardinal, declaring that

He talks to me that never had a son.

In one respect both the sublime and ludicrous are easier than the realistic. They are not required to be true. A man with an imagination and culture may feign either of them without knowing the ways of men. To be realistic you must know accurately that which you describe. How often do we find in novels that the author makes an attempt at realism and falls into a bathos of absurdity, because he cannot use appropriate language?" "No human being ever spoke like that," we say to ourselves—while we should not question the naturalness of the production, either in the grand or the ridiculous.

And yet in very truth the realistic must not be true—but just so far removed from truth as to suit the erroneous idea of truth which the reader may be supposed to entertain. For were a novelist to narrate a conversation between two persons of fair but not high education, and to use the ill-arranged words and fragments of speech which are really common in such conversations, he would seem to have sunk to the ludicrous, and to be attributing to the interlocutors a mode of language much beneath them. Though in fact true, it would seem to be far from natural. But, on the other hand, were he to put words grammatically correct into the mouths of his personages, and to round off and to complete the spoken sentences, the ordinary reader would instantly feel such a style to be stilted and unreal. This reader would not analyse it, but would in some dim but sufficiently critical manner be aware that his author was not providing him with a naturally spoken dialogue. To produce the desired effect the narrator must go between the two. He must mount somewhat above the ordinary conversational powers of such persons as are to be represented—lest he disgust. But he must by no means soar into correct phraseology—lest he offend. The realistic—by which we mean that which shall seem to be real—lies between the two, and in reaching it the writer has not only to keep his proper distance on both sides, but has to maintain varying distances in accordance with the position, mode of life, and education of the speakers. Lady Castlewood in *Esmond* would not have been properly made to speak with absolute precision; but she goes nearer to the mark than her more ignorant lord, the viscount; less near, however, than her better-educated kinsman, Henry Esmond. He, however, is not made to speak altogether by the card, or he would be unnatural. Nor would each of them speak always in the same strain, but they would alter their language according to their companion—according even to the hour of the day. All this the reader unconsciously perceives, and will not think the language to be natural unless the proper variations be there.

In simple narrative the rule is the same as in dialogue, though it does not admit of the same palpable deviation from correct construction. The story of any incident, to be realistic, will admit neither of sesquipedalian grandeur nor of grotesque images. The one gives an idea of romance and the other of burlesque, to neither of which is truth supposed to appertain. We desire to soar frequently, and then we try romance. We desire to recreate ourselves with the easy and droll. *Dulce est desipere in loco*. Then we have recourse to burlesque. But in neither do we expect human nature.

I cannot but think that in the hands of the novelist the middle course is the most powerful. Much as we may delight in burlesque, we cannot claim for it the power of achieving great results. So much, I think, will be granted. For the sublime we look rather to poetry than to prose; and though I will give one or two instances just now in which it has been used with great effect in prose fiction, it does not come home to the heart, teaching a lesson, as does the realistic. The girl who reads is touched by Lucy Ashton, but she feels herself to be convinced of the facts as to Jeanie Deans, and asks herself whether she might not emulate them.

Now as to the realism of Thackeray, I must rather appeal to my readers than attempt to prove it by quotation. Whoever it is that speaks in his pages, does it not seem that such a person would certainly have used such words on such an occasion? If there be need of examination to learn whether it be so or not, let the reader study all that falls from the mouth of Lady Castlewood through the novel called *Esmond*, or all that falls from the mouth of Beatrix. They are persons peculiarly situated—noble women, but who have still lived much out of the world. The former is always conscious of a sorrow; the latter is always striving after an effect—and both on this account are difficult of management. A period for the story has been chosen which is strange and unknown to us, and which has required a peculiar language. One would have said beforehand that whatever might be the charms of the book it would not be natural. And yet the ear is never wounded by a tone that is false. It is not always the case that in novel reading the ear should be wounded because the words spoken are unnatural. Bulwer does not wound, though he never puts into the mouth of any of his persons words such as would have been spoken. They are not expected from him. It is something else that he provides. From Thackeray they are expected—and from many others. But Thackeray never disappoints. Whether it be a great duke, such as he who was to have married Beatrix, or a mean chaplain, such as Tusher, or Captain Steele the humourist, they talk—not as they would have talked probably, of which I am no judge—but as we feel that they might have talked. We find ourselves willing to take it as proved because it is there, which is the strongest possible evidence of the realistic capacity of the writer.

As to the sublime in novels, it is not to be supposed that any very high rank of sublimity is required to put such works within the pale of that definition. I allude to those in which an attempt is made to soar above the ordinary actions and ordinary language of life. We may take as an instance *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. That is intended to be sublime throughout. Even the writer never for a moment thought of descending to real life. She must have been untrue to her own idea of her own business had she done so. It is all stilted—all of a certain altitude among the clouds. It has been in its time a popular book, and has had its world of readers. Those readers no doubt preferred the diluted romance of Mrs. Radcliff to the condensed realism of Fielding. At any rate, they did not look for realism. *Pelham* may be taken as another instance of the sublime, though there is so much in it that is of the world worldly, though an intentional fall to the ludicrous is often made in it. The personages talk in glittering dialogues, throwing about philosophy, science, and the classics, in a manner which is always suggestive and often amusing. The book is brilliant with intellect. But no word is ever spoken as it would have been spoken—no detail is ever narrated as it would have occurred. Bulwer no doubt regarded novels as romantic, and would have looked with contempt on any junction of realism and romance, though, in varying his work, he did not think it beneath him to vary his sublimity with the ludicrous. The sublime in novels is no doubt most effective when it breaks out, as though by some burst of nature, in the midst of a story true to life. “If,” said Evan Maccombich, “the Saxon gentlemen are laughing because a poor man such as me thinks my life, or the life of six of my degree, is worth that of Vich Ian Vohr, it’s like enough they may be very right; but if they laugh because they think I would not keep my word and come back to redeem him, I can tell them they ken neither the heart of a Hielandman nor the honour of a gentleman.” That is sublime. And, again when Balfour of Burleys slaughters Bothwell, the death scene is sublime. “Die, bloodthirsty dog!” said Burley. “Die as thou hast lived! Die like the beasts that perish—hoping nothing, believing nothing!”—“And fearing nothing,” said Bothwell. Horrible as is the picture, it is sublime. As is also that speech of Meg Merrilies, as she addresses Mr. Bertram, standing on the bank. “Ride your ways,” said the gipsy; “ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram. This day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths; see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses; look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster. Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derncleugh; see that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane at Ellangowan.” That is romance, and reaches the very height of the sublime. That does not offend, impossible though it be that any old woman should have



spoken such words, because it does in truth lift the reader up among the bright stars. It is thus that the sublime may be mingled with the realistic, if the writer has the power. Thackeray also rises in that way to a high pitch, though not in many instances. Romance does not often justify to him an absence of truth. The scene between Lady Castlewood and the Duke of Hamilton is one when she explains to her child's suitor who Henry Esmond is. "My daughter may receive presents from the head of our house," says the lady, speaking up for her kinsman. "My daughter may thankfully take kindness from her father's, her mother's, her brother's dearest friend." The whole scene is of the same nature, and is evidence of Thackeray's capacity for the sublime. And again, when the same lady welcomes the same kinsman on his return from the wars, she rises as high. But as I have already quoted a part of the passage in the chapter on this novel, I will not repeat it here.

It may perhaps be said of the sublime in novels—which I have endeavoured to describe as not being generally of a high order—that it is apt to become cold, stilted and unsatisfactory. What may be done by impossible castles among impossible mountains, peopled by impossible heroes and heroines, and fraught with impossible horrors, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* have shown us. But they require a patient reader, and one who can content himself with a long protracted and most unemotional excitement. The sublimity which is effected by sparkling speeches is better, if the speeches really have something in them beneath the sparkles. Those of Bulwer generally have. Those of his imitators are often without anything, the sparkles even hardly sparkling. At the best they fatigue; and a novel, if it fatigues, is unpardonable. Its only excuse is to be found in the amusement it affords. It should instruct, also, no doubt, but it never will do so unless it hides its instruction and amuses. Scott understood all this, when he allowed himself only such sudden bursts as I have described. Even in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which I do not regard as among the best of his performances, as he soars high into the sublime, so does he descend low into the ludicrous.

In this latter division of pure fiction—the burlesque, as it is commonly called, or the ludicrous—Thackeray is quite as much at home as in the realistic, though, the vehicle being less powerful, he has achieved smaller results by it. Manifest as are the objects in his view when he wrote *The Hoggarty Diamond*, or *The Legend of the Rhine*, they were less important and less evidently affected than those attempted by *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*. Captain Shindy, the snob, does not tell us so plainly what is not a gentleman as does Colonel Newcome what is. Nevertheless, the ludicrous has, with Thackeray, been very powerful and very delightful.

In trying to describe what is done by literature of this class, it is especially necessary to remember that different readers are affected

in a different way. That which is one man's meat is another man's poison. In the sublime, when the really grand has been reached, it is the reader's own fault if he be not touched. We know that many are indifferent to the soliloquies of Hamlet, but we do not hesitate to declare to ourselves that they are so because they lack the power of appreciating grand language. We do not scruple to attribute to those who are indifferent some inferiority of intelligence. And in regard to the realistic, when the truth of a well-told story or life-like character does not come home, we think that then, too, there is deficiency in the critical ability. But there is nothing necessarily lacking to a man because he does not enjoy *The Heathen Chinee* or *The Biglow Papers*; and the man to whom these delights of American humour are leather and prunello may be of all the most enraptured by the wit of Sam Weller or the mock piety of Pecksniff. It is a matter of taste and not of intellect, as one man likes caviare after his dinner while another prefers apple-pie; and the man himself cannot, or, as far as we can see, does not, direct his own taste in the one matter more than in the other.

Therefore I cannot ask others to share with me the delight which I have in the various and peculiar expressions of the ludicrous which are common to Thackeray. Some considerable portion of it consists in bad spelling. We may say that Charles James Harrington Fitzroy Yellowplush, or C. Fitz Jeames De La Pluche, as he is afterwards called, would be nothing but for his "orthogwaphy so carefully inaccurate." As I have before said, Mrs. Malaprop had seemed to have reached the height of this humour, and in having done so to have made any repetition unpalatable. But Thackeray's studied blundering is altogether different from that of Sheridan. Mrs. Malaprop uses her words in a delightfully wrong sense. Yellowplush would be a very intelligible, if not quite an accurate writer, had he not made for himself special forms of English words altogether new to the eye.

"My ma wrapped up my buth in a mistry. I may be illygitmit; I may have been changed at nus; but I've always had gen'l'm'nly tastes through life, and have no doubt that I come of a gen'l'm'nly origum." We cannot admit that there is wit, or even humour, in bad spelling alone. Were it not that Yellowplush, with his bad spelling, had so much to say for himself, there would be nothing in it; but there is always a sting of satire directed against some real vice, or some growing vulgarity, which is made sharper by the absurdity of the language. In *The Diary of George IV.* there are the following reflections on a certain correspondence: "Wooden you phansy, now, that the author of such a letter, instead of writun about pippel of tip-top quality, was describin' Vinegar Yard? Would you beleave that the lady he was a-ritin' to was a chased modist lady of honour and mother of a family? *O trumpery! o morris!* as Homer says.

This is a higeous pictur of manners, such as I weap to think of, as every morl man must weap." We do not wonder that when he makes his "ajew" he should have been called up to be congratulated on the score of his literary performances by his master, before the Duke, and Lord Bagwig, and Dr. Larnar, and "Sawedwadgeorgeearlitt-nbulwig." All that Yellowplush says or writes are among the pearls which Thackeray was continually scattering abroad.

But this of the distinguished footman was only one of the forms of the ludicrous which he was accustomed to use in the furtherance of some purpose which he had at heart. It was his practice to clothe things most revolting with an assumed grace and dignity, and to add to the weight of his condemnation by the astounding mendacity of the parody thus drawn. There was a grim humour in this which has been displeasing to some, as seeming to hold out to vice a hand which has appeared for too long a time to be friendly. As we are disposed to be not altogether sympathetic with a detective policeman who shall have spent a jolly night with a delinquent, for the sake of tracing home the suspected guilt to his late comrade, so are some disposed to be almost angry with our author, who seems to be too much at home with his rascals, and to live with them on familiar terms till we doubt whether he does not forget their rascality. *Barry Lyndon* is the strongest example we have of this style of the ludicrous, and the critics of whom I speak have thought that our friendly relations with Barry have been too genial, too apparently genuine, so that it might almost be doubtful whether during the narrative we might not, at this or the other crisis, be rather with him than against him. "After all," the reader might say, on coming to that passage in which Barry defends his trade as a gambler—a passage which I have quoted in speaking of the novel—"after all, this man is more hero than scoundrel," so well is the burlesque humour maintained, so well does the scoundrel hide his own villany. I can easily understand that to some it should seem too long drawn out. To me it seems to be the perfection of humour—and of philosophy. If such a one as Barry Lyndon, a man full of intellect, can be made thus to love and cherish his vice, and to believe in its beauty, how much more necessary is it to avoid the footsteps which lead to it? But, as I have said above, there is no standard by which to judge of the excellence of the ludicrous as there is of the sublime, and even the realistic.

No writer ever had a stronger proclivity towards parody than Thackeray; and we may, I think, confess that there is no form of literary drollery more dangerous. The parody will often mar the gem of which it coarsely reproduces the outward semblance. The word "damaged," used instead of "damask," has destroyed to my ear for ever the music of one of the sweetest passages in Shakespeare. But it must be acknowledged of Thackeray that, fond as he is of this branch of humour, he has done little or no injury by his parodies.



They run over with fun, but are so contrived that they do not lessen the flavour of the original. I have given in one of the preceding chapters a little set of verses of his own, called *The Willow Tree*, and his own parody on his own work. There the reader may see how effective a parody may be in destroying the sentiment of the piece parodied. But in dealing with other authors he has been grotesque without being severely critical, and has been very like, without making ugly or distasteful that which he has imitated. No one who has admired *Coningsby* will admire it the less because of *Codlingsby*. Nor will the undoubted romance of *Eugene Aram* be lessened in the estimation of any reader of novels by the well-told career of *George de Barnwell*. One may say that to laugh *Ivanhoe* out of face, or to lessen the glory of that immortal story, would be beyond the power of any farcical effect. Thackeray, in his *Rowena and Rebecca*, certainly had no such purpose. Nothing of *Ivanhoe* is injured, nothing made less valuable than it was before, yet, of all prose parodies in the language, it is perhaps the most perfect. Every character is maintained, every incident has a taste of Scott. It has the twang of *Ivanhoe* from beginning to end, and yet there is not a word in it by which the author of *Ivanhoe* could have been offended. But then there is the purpose beyond that of the mere parody. Prudish women have to be laughed at, and despotic kings, and parasite lords and bishops. The ludicrous alone is but poor fun; but when the ludicrous has a meaning, it can be very effective in the hands of such a master as this.

“He to die!” resumed the bishop. “He a mortal like to us!  
 Death was not for him intended, though *communis omnibus*.  
 Keeper, you are irreligious, for to talk and cavil thus!”

So much I have said of the manner in which Thackeray did his work, endeavouring to represent human nature as he saw it, so that his readers should learn to love what is good, and to hate what is evil. As to the merits of his style, it will be necessary to insist on them the less, because it has been generally admitted to be easy, lucid, and grammatical. I call that style easy by which the writer has succeeded in conveying to the reader that which the reader is intended to receive with the least possible amount of trouble to him. I call that style lucid which conveys to the reader most accurately all that the writer wishes to convey on any subject. The two virtues, will I think, be seen to be very different. An author may wish to give an idea that a certain flavour is bitter. He shall leave a conviction that it is simply disagreeable. Then he is not lucid. But he shall convey so much as that, in such a manner as to give the reader no trouble in arriving at the conclusion. Therefore he is easy. The subject here suggested is as little complicated as possible; but in the intercourse which is going on continually between writers and readers, affairs of all degrees of complication are continually being discussed,

of a nature so complicated that the inexperienced writer is puzzled at every turn to express himself, and the altogether inartistic writer fails to do so. Who among writers has not to acknowledge that he is often unable to tell all that he has to tell? Words refuse to do for him. He struggles and stumbles and alters and adds, but finds at last that he has gone either too far or not quite far enough. Then there comes upon him the necessity of choosing between two evils. He must either give up the fullness of his thought, and content himself with presenting some fragment of it in that lucid arrangement of words which he affects; or he must bring out his thought with ambages; he must mass his sentences inconsequentially; he must struggle up hill almost hopelessly with his phrases—so that at the end the reader will have to labour as he himself has laboured, or else to leave behind much of the fruit which it has been intended that he should garner. It is the ill-fortune of some to be neither easy or lucid; and there is nothing more wonderful in the history of letters than the patience of readers when called upon to suffer under the double calamity. It is as though a man were reading a dialogue of Plato, understanding neither the subject nor the language. But it is often the case that one has to be sacrificed to the other. The pregnant writer will sometimes solace himself by declaring that it is not his business to supply intelligence to the reader; and then, in throwing out the entirety of his thought, will not stop to remember that he cannot hope to scatter his ideas far and wide unless he can make them easily intelligible. Then the writer who is determined that his book shall not be put down because it is troublesome, is too apt to avoid the knotty bits and shirk the rocky turns, because he cannot with ease to himself make them easy to others. If this be acknowledged, I shall be held to be right in saying not only that ease and lucidity in style are different virtues, but that they are often opposed to each other. They may, however, be combined, and then the writer will have really learned the art of writing. *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*. It is to be done, I believe, in all languages. A man by art and practice shall at least obtain such a masterhood over words as to express all that he thinks, in phrases that shall be easily understood.

In such a small space as can here be allowed, I cannot give instances to prove that this has been achieved by Thackeray. Nor would instances prove the existence of the virtue, though instances might the absence. The proof lies in the work of the man's life, and can only become plain to those who have read his writings. I must refer readers to their own experiences, and ask them whether they have found themselves compelled to study passages in Thackeray in order that they might find a recondite meaning, or whether they have not been sure that they and the author have together understood all that there was to understand in the matter. Have they run backward

over the passages, and then gone on, not quite sure what the author has meant? If not, then he has been easy and lucid. We have not had it so easy with all modern writers nor with all that are old. I may best, perhaps, explain my meaning by taking something written long ago; something very valuable, in order that I may not damage my argument by comparing the easiness of Thackeray with the harshness of some author who has in other respects failed of obtaining approbation. If you take the play of *Cymbeline*, you will, I think, find it to be anything but easy reading. Nor is Shakespeare always lucid. For purposes of his own he will sometimes force his readers to doubt his meaning, even after prolonged study. It has ever been so with *Hamlet*. My readers will not, I think, be so crossgrained with me as to suppose that I am putting Thackeray as a master of style above Shakespeare. I am only endeavouring to explain by reference to the great master the condition of literary production which he attained. Whatever Thackeray says, the reader cannot fail to understand; and whatever Thackeray attempts to communicate, he succeeds in conveying.

That he is grammatical I must leave to my readers' judgment, with a simple assertion in his favour. There are some who say that grammar—by which I mean accuracy of composition, in accordance with certain acknowledged rules—is only a means to an end; and that, if a writer can absolutely achieve the end by some other mode of his own, he need not regard the prescribed means. If a man can so write as to be easily understood, and to convey lucidly that which he has to convey without accuracy of grammar, why should he subject himself to unnecessary trammels? Why not make a path for himself, if the path so made will certainly lead him whither he wishes to go? The answer is, that no other path will lead others whither he wishes to carry them, but that which is common to him and to those others. It is necessary that there should be a ground equally familiar to the writer and to his readers. If there be no such common ground, they will certainly not come into full accord. There have been recusants who, by a certain acuteness of their own, have partly done so—wilful recusants; but they have been recusants, not to the extent of discarding grammar—which no writer could do and not be altogether in the dark—but so far as to have created for themselves a phraseology which has been picturesque by reason of its illicit vagaries; as a woman will sometimes please ill-instructed eyes and ears by little departures from feminine propriety. They have probably laboured in their vocation as sedulously as though they had striven to be correct, and have achieved at the best but a short-lived success—as is the case also with the unconventional female. The charm of the disorderly soon loses itself in the ugliness of disorder. And there are others rebellious from grammar, who are, however, hardly to be called rebels, because the laws which they break have



never been altogether known to them. Among those very dear to me in English literature, one or two might be named of either sort, whose works, though they have that in them which will insure to them a long life, will become from year to year less valuable and less venerable, because their authors have either scorned or have not known that common ground of language on which the author and his readers should stand together. My purport here is only with Thackeray, and I say that he stands always on that common ground. He quarrels with none of the laws. As the lady who is most attentive to conventional propriety may still have her own fashion of dress and her own mode of speech, so had Thackeray very manifestly his own style; but it is one the correctness of which has never been impugned.

I hold that gentleman to be the best dressed whose dress no one observes. I am not sure but that the same may be said of an author's written language. Only, where shall we find an example of such perfection? Always easy, always lucid, always correct, we may find them; but who is the writer, easy, lucid, and correct, who has not impregnated his writing with something of that personal flavour which we call mannerism? To speak of authors well-known to all readers—Does not *The Rambler* taste of Johnson; *The Decline and Fall*, of Gibbon; *The Middle Ages*, of Hallam; *The History of England*, of Macaulay; and *The Invasion of the Crimea*, of Kinglake? Do we not know the elephantine tread of *The Saturday*, and the precise toe of *The Spectator*? I have sometimes thought that Swift has been nearest to the mark of any—writing English and not writing Swift. But I doubt whether an accurate observer would not trace even here the “mark of the beast.” Thackeray, too, has a strong flavour of Thackeray. I am inclined to think that his most besetting sin in style—the little ear-mark by which he is most conspicuous—is a certain affected familiarity. He indulges too frequently in little confidences with individual readers, in which pretended allusions to himself are frequent. “What would you do? what would you say now, if you were in such a position?” he asks. He describes this practice of his in the preface to *Pendennis*. “It is a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader. . . . In the course of his volubility the perpetual speaker must of necessity lay bare his own weaknesses, vanities, peculiarities.” In the short contributions to periodicals on which he tried his ‘prentice hand, such addresses and conversations were natural and efficacious; but in a larger work of fiction they cause an absence of that dignity to which even a novel may aspire. You feel that each morsel as read is a detached bit, and that it has all been written in detachments. The book is robbed of its integrity by a certain good-humoured geniality of language, which causes the reader to be too much at home with his author. There is a saying that familiarity breeds contempt, and I have been sometimes inclined to think that our author has sometimes failed to stand up for himself with “sufficiency of” personal deportment.”

In other respects Thackeray's style is excellent. As I have said before, the reader always understands his words without an effort, and receives all that the author has to give.

There now remains to be discussed the matter of our author's work. The manner and the style are but the natural wrappings in which the goods have been prepared for the market. Of these goods it is no doubt true that unless the wrappings be in some degree meritorious the article will not be accepted at all; but it is the kernel which we seek, which, if it be not of itself sweet and digestible, cannot be made serviceable by any shell, however pretty or easy to be cracked. I have said previously that it is the business of a novel to instruct in morals and to amuse. I will go further, and will add, having been for many years a most prolific writer of novels myself, that I regard him who can put himself into close communication with young people year after year without making some attempt to do them good as a very sorry fellow indeed. However poor your matter may be, however near you may come to that "foolishness of existing mortals," as Carlyle presumes some unfortunate novelist to be, still, if there be those who read your works, they will undoubtedly be more or less influenced by what they find there. And it is because the novelist amuses that he is thus influential. The sermon too often has no such effect, because it is applied with the declared intention of having it. The palpable and overt dose the child rejects; but that which is cunningly insinuated by the aid of jam or honey is accepted unconsciously, and goes on upon its curative mission. So it is with the novel. It is taken because of its jam and honey. But, unlike the honest simple jam and honey of the household cupboard, it is never unmixed with physic. There will be the dose within it, either curative or poisonous. The girl will be taught modesty or immodesty, truth or falsehood; the lad will be taught honour or dishonour, simplicity or affectation. Without the lesson the amusement will not be there. There are novels which certainly can teach nothing; but then neither can they amuse any one.

I should be said to insist absurdly on the power of my own confraternity if I were to declare that the bulk of the young people in the upper and middle classes receive their moral teaching chiefly from the novels they read. Mothers would no doubt think of their own sweet teaching; fathers of the examples which they set; and schoolmasters of the excellence of their instructions. Happy is the country that has such mothers, fathers, and schoolmasters! But the novelist creeps in closer than the schoolmaster, closer than the father, closer almost than the mother. He is the chosen guide, the tutor whom the young pupil chooses for herself. She retires with him, suspecting no lesson, safe against rebuke, throwing herself head and heart into the narration as she can hardly do into her task-work; and there she is taught—how she shall learn to love; how she shall receive the lover

when he comes ; how far she should advance to meet the joy ; why she should be reticent, and not throw herself at once into this new delight. It is the same with the young man, though he would be more prone even than she to reject the suspicion of such tutorship. But he too will there learn either to speak the truth, or to lie ; and will receive from his novel lessons either of real manliness, or of that affected apishness and tailor-begotten demeanour which too many professors of the craft give out as their darest precepts.

At any rate the close intercourse is admitted. Where is the house now from which novels are tabooed ? Is it not common to allow them almost indiscriminately, so that young and old each chooses his own novel ? Shall he, then, to whom this close fellowship is allowed—this inner confidence—shall he not be careful what words he uses, and what thoughts he expresses, when he sits in council with his young friend ? This, which it will certainly be his duty to consider with so much care, will be the matter of his work. We know what was thought of such matter when Lydia in the play was driven to the necessity of flinging "*Peregrine Pickle* under the toilet," and thrusting "*Lord Aimwell* under the sofa." We have got beyond that now, and are tolerably sure that our girls do not hide their novels. The more freely they are allowed, the more necessary is it that he who supplies shall take care that they are worthy of the trust that is given to them.

Now let the reader ask himself what are the lessons which Thackeray has taught. Let him send his memory running back over all those characters of whom we have just been speaking, and ask himself whether any girl has been taught to be immodest, or any man unmanly, by what Thackeray has written. A novelist has two modes of teaching—by good example or bad. It is not to be supposed that because the person treated of be evil, therefore the precept will be evil. If so, some personages with whom we have been well acquainted from our youth upwards would have been omitted in our early lessons. It may be a question whether the teaching is not more efficacious which comes from the evil example. What story was ever more powerful in showing the beauty of feminine reticence, and the horrors of feminine evil-doing, than the fate of Effie Deans ? The Templar would have betrayed a woman to his lust, but has not encouraged others by the freedom of his life. Varney was utterly bad—but though a gay courtier, he has enticed no others to go the way that he went. So it has been with Thackeray. His examples have been generally of that kind—but they have all been efficacious in their teaching on the side of modesty and manliness, truth and simplicity. When some girl shall have traced from first to last the character of Beatrix, what, let us ask, will be the result on her mind ? Beatrix was born noble, clever, beautiful, with certain material advantages, which it was within her compass to improve by



her nobility, wit, and beauty. She was quite alive to that fact, and thought of those material advantages, to the utter exclusion, in our mind, of any idea of moral goodness. She realised it all, and told herself that that was the game she would play. "Twenty-five!" says she; "and in eight years no man has ever touched my heart!" That is her boast when she is about to be married—her only boast of herself. "A most detestable young woman!" some will say. "An awful example!" others will add. Not a doubt of it. She proves the misery of her own career so fully that no one will follow it. The example is so awful that it will surely deter. The girl will declare to herself that not in that way will she look for the happiness which she hopes to enjoy; and the young man will say, as he reads it, that no Beatrix shall touch his heart.

You may go through all his characters with the same effect. Pen-dennis will be scorned because he is light; Warrington loved because he is strong and merciful; Dobbin will be honoured because he is unselfish; and the old colonel, though he be foolish, vain, and weak, almost worshipped because he is so true a gentleman. It is in the handling of questions such as these that we have to look for the matter of the novelist—those moral lessons which he mixes up with his jam and his honey. I say that with Thackeray the physic is always curative and never poisonous. He may be admitted safely into that close fellowship, and be allowed to accompany the dear ones to their retreats. The girl will never become bold under his preaching, or taught to throw herself at men's heads. Nor will the lad receive a false flashy idea of what becomes a youth, when he is first about to take his place among men.

As to that other question, whether Thackeray be amusing as well as salutary, I must leave it to public opinion. There is now being brought out of his works a more splendid edition than has ever been produced in any age or any country of the writings of such an author. A certain fixed number of copies only is being issued, and each copy will cost £33 12s. when completed. It is understood that a very large proportion of the edition has been already bought or ordered. Cost, it will be said, is a bad test of excellence. It will not prove the merit of a book any more than it will of a horse. But it is proof of the popularity of the book. Print and illustrate and bind up some novels how you will, no one will buy them. Previous to these costly volumes, there have been two entire editions of his works since the author's death, one comparatively cheap and the other dear. Before his death his stories had been scattered in all imaginable forms. I may therefore assert that their charm has been proved by their popularity.

There remains for us only this question—whether the nature of Thackeray's works entitles him to be called a cynic. The word is one which is always used in a bad sense. "Of a dog; currish," is the

definition which we get from Johnson—quite correctly, and in accordance with its etymology. And he gives us examples. “How vilely does this cynic rhyme,” he takes from Shakespeare; and Addison speaks of a man degenerating into a cynic. That Thackeray’s nature was soft and kindly—gentle almost to a fault—has been shown elsewhere. But they who have called him a cynic have spoken of him merely as a writer—and as writer he has certainly taken upon himself the special task of barking at the vices and follies of the world around him. Any satirist might in the same way be called a cynic in so far as his satire goes. Swift was a cynic, certainly. Pope was cynical when he was a satirist. Juvenal was all cynical, because he was all satirist. If that be what is meant, Thackeray was certainly a cynic. But that is not all the word implies. It intends to go back beyond the work of the man, and to describe his heart. It says of any satirist so described that he has given himself up to satire, not because things have been evil, but because he himself has been evil. Hamlet is a satirist, whereas Thersites is a cynic. If Thackeray be judged after this fashion, the word is as inappropriate to the writer as to the man.

But it has to be confessed that Thackeray did allow his intellect to be too thoroughly saturated with the aspect of the ill side of things. We can trace the operation of his mind from his earliest days, when he commenced his parodies at school; when he brought out *The Snob* at Cambridge, when he sent *Yellowplush* out upon the world as a satirist on the doings of gentlemen generally; when he wrote his *Catharine*, to show the vileness of the taste for what he would have called Newgate literature; and *The Hoggarty Diamond*, to attack bubble companies; and *Barry Lyndon*, to expose the pride which a rascal may take in his rascality. Becky Sharp, Major Pendennis, Beatrice, both as a young and as an old woman, were written with the same purpose. There is a touch of satire in every drawing that he made. A jeer is needed for something that is ridiculous, scorn has to be thrown on something that is vile. The same feeling is to be found in every line of every ballad

#### VANITAS VANITATUM

Methinks the text is never stale,  
And life is every day renewing  
Fresh comments on the old, old tale.  
Of Folly, Fortune, Glory, Ruin.

Hark to the preacher, preaching still !  
He lifts his voice and cries his sermon,  
Here at St. Peter’s of Cornhill,  
As yonder on the Mount of Hermon—

For you and me to heart to take  
(O dear beloved brother readers),  
To-day—as when the good king spake  
Beneath the solemn Syrian cedars.

It was just so with him always. He was "crying his sermon," hoping, if it might be so, to do something towards lessening the evils he saw around him. We all preach our sermon, but not always with the same earnestness. He had become so urgent in the cause, so loud in his denunciations, that he did not stop often to speak of the good things around him. Now and again he paused and blessed amid the torrent of his anathemas. There are Dobbin, and Esmond, and Colonel Newcome. But his anathemas are the loudest. It has been so, I think, nearly always with the eloquent preachers.

I will insert here—especially here at the end of this chapter, in which I have spoken of Thackeray's matter and manner of writing, because of the justice of the criticism conveyed—the lines which Lord Houghton wrote on his death, and which are to be found in the February number of *The Cornhill* of 1864. It was the first number printed after his death. I would add that, though no Dean applied for permission to bury Thackeray in Westminster Abbey, his bust was placed there without delay. What is needed by the nation in such a case is simply a lasting memorial there, where such memorials are most often seen and most highly honoured. But we can all of us sympathise with the feeling of the poet, writing immediately on the loss of such a friend :

When one, whose nervous English verse  
Public and party hates defied,  
Who bore and bandied many a curse  
Of angry times—when Dryden died,

Our royal abbey's Bishop-Dean  
Waited for no suggestive prayer,  
But, ere one day closed o'er the scene,  
Craved, as a boon, to lay him there.

The wayward faith, the faulty life,  
Vanished before a nation's pain.  
Panther and Hind forgot their strife,  
And rival statesmen thronged the fane.

O gentle censor of our age !  
Prime master of our ampler tongue !  
Whose word of wit and generous page  
Were never wrath, except with wrong,—

Fielding—without the manner's dross,  
Scott—with a spirit's larger room,  
What Prelate deem' thy grave his loss ?  
What Halifax erects thy tomb ?

But, may be, he—who so could draw  
The hidden great—the humble wise,  
Yielding with them to God's good law,  
Makes the Pantheon where he lies.











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